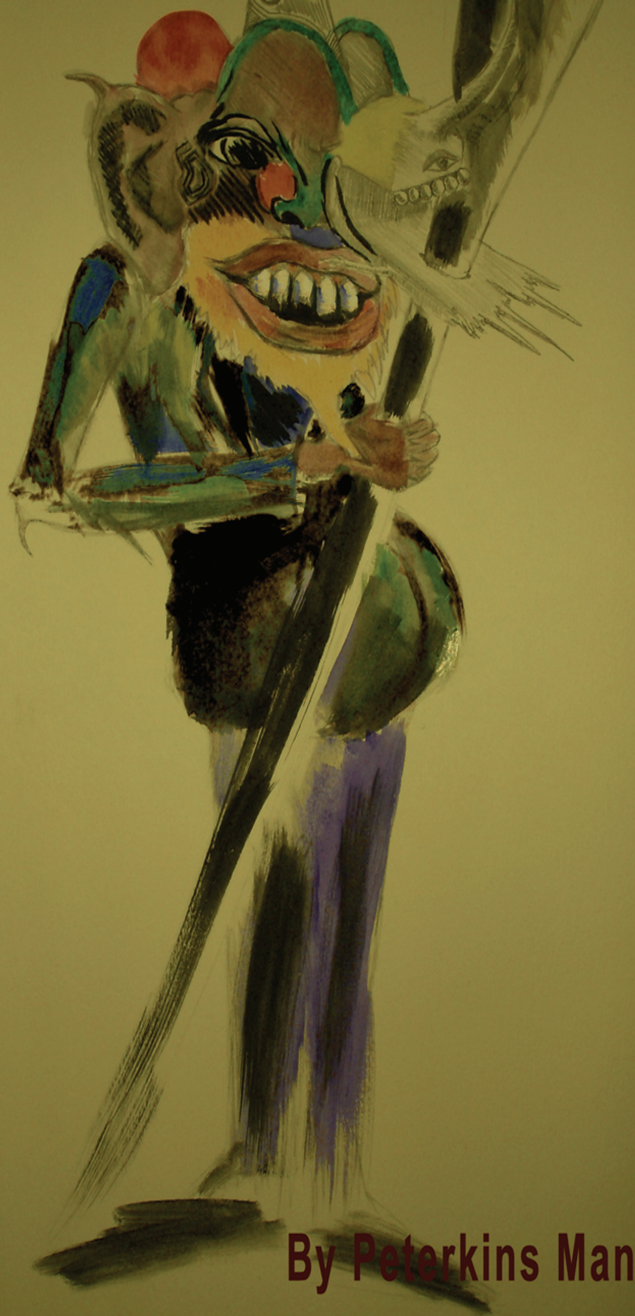


GOD THE POLITICIAN



By Peterkins Manyong

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Peterkins Manyong



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Introduction

This book consists of 24 chapters in which the author covers a variety of issues on blood and terror in Cameroonian democracy. Titled ‘A Political Messiah is Born’, Chapter One recounts the launch of the SDF on 26 May 1990 in Bamenda, the capital of the North West Province of Cameroon. In a desperate attempt to prevent it, six youth were shot dead during Fru Ndi’s speech to launch the party in which he called on fellow Cameroonians to stand up and shake off what he saw as the yoke of dictatorship imposed on them by the Biya regime. Chapter Two on ‘Unwise Men from the East’ recounts the attempts by the Biya regime first to bribe and then to intimidate Fru Ndi and force him escape to Nigeria but these attempts instead drew national and international attention and sympathy for him.

Chapter Three, titled ‘Murdering the Insurgents’, recounts the fierce political battles between Biya and the CPDM on the one hand and the opposition on the other. The opposition formed an alliance called the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations and launched ‘Operation Ghost Town’ and civil disobedience campaigns that paralyzed economic activities in nearly three-quarters of the country. Biya retaliated by dispatching security operatives to engage in taxi driving and intimidation to break the operation. This is followed by a discussion on the Ndu Genocide in Chapter Four, which recounts how gendarmes invaded the opposition stronghold of the Ndu, massacred the people and raped women. They were acting on the instructions of the ruling party’s barons and the administration. Called ‘Electors and Cheaters’ Chapter Five recounts how the 1992 presidential elections were won by Fru Ndi, but the Supreme Court said it was not given the power to cancel the results. Chapter Six deals with the post-election violence that resulted in the killing of a political party leader and the massive destruction of homes belonging to supporters of the ruling party in the Northwest. Chapter Seven discusses what happened during the state of emergency imposed in the North West Province following the 1992 elections, putting Ni John Fru Ndi of the Social Democratic Front under house arrest and the killing and rape of opposition supporters. Chapter Eight discusses ‘Patriots and Gangsters’ and narrates how Fru Ndi and his supporters staged demonstrations to recover his ‘stolen’ election victory and how this led to clashes with gendarmes and the killing of two SDF vanguards. At the

same time, armed robbers targeted French installations in Bamenda.

In 'Recollections of a Faked Coup', Chapter Nine recalls the 1984 coup attempt on 6 April against Biya, how it was crushed and the reprisals that followed. Chapter Ten titled 'Constitutional Acrobats' shows how Biya announced a constitutional conference but then manipulated it in such a way that the opposition boycotted it and Anglophones became angry and held a conference in Buea, the headquarters of their former government. The fight for an autonomous board for Anglophone exams began and was accomplished in the period when the constitutional conference was being held. Chapter Eleven called 'Home Bred Terrorist' narrates the story of how a gang of supposed brigands launched and sustained a hit-and-run attack for three consecutive days on military installations in the north. Stations were targeted, more than ten people were killed and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed on the province.

Chapter Twelve titled 'State Persecutors' recounts the trial of the supposed terrorists in which the Francophone judges who were involved in it were more persecutors than prosecutors. Chapter Thirteen 'Terror Suspects Narrate Harrowing Tales' is an account of the torture and rape of the Anglophone terror suspects while they were in detention. Chapter Fourteen deals with 'Electoral Gymnastics and the Military Option' and recounts how the SDF planned a military offensive but later dropped the idea. Chapter Fifteen 'Tribute to Machiavelli' recounts the beating up of a Fru Ndi challenger who wanted to hold a convention because the party and its chairman were not doing things the right way. Chapter Sixteen 'The Law of Karma' focuses on Fru Ndi's illness which many, including the chairman, attributed to poison and how after his recovery he authorized the brutalization of some of his opponents. Chapter Seventeen called 'The Cardinal Political Parties and State Terror' throws light on the activities of the Operational Command, a squad created to fight banditry in Douala, Cameroon's political capital, but which ended up being used to settle scores.

Chapter Eighteen, 'Spiritual Democracy', comments on the activities of the national elections observatory created by President Biya to supervise and control elections. Ntumfor Nico Halle, the Northwest representative was exemplary in controlling the election. Chapter Nineteen titled 'Power and the Man' dwells on the power struggle between Fru Ndi and some top party officials that led to the death of an innocent man. Chapter Twenty titled 'Bloody Universities' focuses on the strikes and killings that rocked Cameroon universities, especially that in Buea. Chapter Twenty One titled 'Hunter Hunted' narrates the brutal killing by Fon Doh, a CPDM baron of an SDF district chairman and how the culprit and accomplices were tried and jailed. Chapter Twenty Two

‘The Phenomenon called Baba Danpullo’ recounts the activities of a rich political baron who oppressed the Mbororo, a minority tribe with the backing of local government officials. Chapter Twenty Three is a portrait of President Biya, a political magician who manipulates even Western nations. And finally Chapter Twenty Four examines the role of the church in Cameroon politics.

“Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly and prescribing the wrong remedy” *Ernest Benn*



Birth of a Political Messiah

The news fell like a thunderbolt. ‘A new political party has just been formed. It will be launched on 20 May 1990.’ The leader of the new party was a Bamenda-based bookseller, Ni John Fru Ndi; proprietor of Ebibi bookshop along Bamenda Commercial Avenue. In palm-wine drinking houses, bars, beer parlours, markets and street corners in Bamenda, the topic was the same: the name of the new political party was the Social Democratic Front (SDF). The man in the street quickly interpreted it to mean ‘Suffer Don Finish’ in Pidgin English, to suit their dreams and aspirations of seeing the end of the Biya regime that, they were categorical, had brought economic hardship to Cameroon.

To pre-empt such an eventuality, the Biya regime acting through the DO of Bamenda Central, issued an order banning the planned launch and warned all those supporting or sympathizing with such a venture against the dire consequences of continuing to do so. The order produced the reverse effect. John Fru Ndi suddenly became a household name in Cameroon and could say with greater justification than Lord Byron: ‘I woke up one morning to find myself famous’.

Dear readers, I deem it necessary to caution you here that this is not just a history book. It is an account of what I saw, read in papers and watched on TV, with an analysis of the facts. To put it another way, it is a concatenation of common events with some uncommon observations on them.

I therefore intend in the course of this narrative to not only digress but also to skip months, weeks and days during which nothing spectacular or noteworthy occurred. This approach has been placed in a positive light by Henry Fielding, one of my favourite English authors. Fielding thinks a good historical account should not be like a stage coach which sets out on its journey whether it is full or empty.

To place the idea in a modern context, an account of past events should not behave like the buses of Guarantee Transport Agency when the company was first established in Bamenda. Whether it had passengers or not, every bus left at a particular time, most of the seats empty or occupied by ‘motor boys’ travelling for free. This was an error the

company later corrected.

We will also not behave like some regular newspapers which, to keep their rendezvous with readers, must print whether they have interesting stories or not. The history of the SDF is no novelty to Cameroonians, especially those already of adult age in 1990. To simply state what happened without pointing out the implications would be a near complete waste of time if not a disservice to the unsuspecting Cameroonian reader who would be constrained to purchase for the second time what is already in his/her archive or bookshelf, given that other writers have already published more quickly than me on the subject. My preoccupation here is why democracy remains a fleeting illusion seventeen years after the launch of a party that promised to bring change to Cameroon. I also intend to focus my searchlight on the Anglophone problem in a Cameroon aggravated by the ruthless system in place, and the university crisis that stemmed from the regime's inability to handle academic complications. The excesses of Fon Doh and Baba Amadou Danpullo, two Frankenstein monsters created by the system, will also be examined. The activities of the Operational Command, a murderous squad created by the regime to subjugate the pro-opposition inhabitants of Douala, the country's economic capital and the pretext of fighting urban crime will be given the attention deserved by that event which led to the loss of over 600 lives. Most of the victims were innocent civilians.

As I hinted earlier, the prospect of the SDF's launch raised the hopes of most Cameroonians. They saw the soon-to-be launch as a panacea to their sufferings and Fru Ndi as the long-awaited Messiah who would redeem the country from the stranglehold of a regime that had plunged Cameroon into an economic quagmire. The party leadership argued that the late Amadou Ahidjo, the previous head of state, had left behind a vibrant economy and that the country had been brought to its knees by tribalism, nepotism and the mismanagement of its vast resources.

I graduated from the University of Yaoundé in 1986 with a BA in English Modern Letters and in the four years that followed merely scratched a living as a lecturer in various private colleges in and around Bamenda. Rather than improving, my wages dwindled with each passing year despite the fact that inflation was on the increase. After teaching at Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School in Mankon, I descended to Unity College, Bali and later ascended to the rank of senior lecturer in English, Literature and French in the Comprehensive High School in Bambui, where I earned FCFA 67,000 and taught more than 32 periods a week. At Longa Comprehensive College, my next stop, I was also a 'senior' English language teacher and began with a pay package of FCFA 60,000 a month (the equivalence of US\$120) and as compensation for my experience and

longevity in service, my salary later dropped to FCFA 45,000 before I quit in 1995. The victim of such intellectual exploitation was sure to be an enthusiastic supporter of any movement opposed to the regime in place.

In brief, I became one of the new party's most fanatical supporters and 'a notorious democrat' even before I knew what the whole thing was about. The secret police soon became acquainted with my inclination and traced me wherever I went, as I was to learn later from a former college friend in the police force.

As the countdown to the launch began, Bamenda Town became increasingly militarized, with government spies swarming the place, but I did not care less. Nelson Mandela had just been released. The popularity of this distinguished ex-prisoner was a source of inspiration for many in Bamenda, who began to view prison, especially for those who opposed the system in place, more as a stepping stone to political glory than a place of infamy or ignominy.

Before then, I had become interested in journalism thanks to Gabriel Alenda, a colleague at Longla College. Alenda was the organizer of the school's journalism club and later became the publisher of *The Cameroon Mirror*, a weekly 16-page newspaper. Alenda was pleased with my inclination to political analysis and not only invited me to write for his paper but also gave me a press card bearing the title 'Analyst'.

Convinced that I could more easily acquire immunity as a reporter than as a political fanatic, I became a devoted reporter for *The Cameroon Mirror*. But frankly, my political sentiments were far stronger than my journalism. I became a frequent visitor at Ntarinkon and at Ebibi bookshop where I listened to the anti-government declarations of Fru Ndi with even more eagerness and rapt attention than a new Born-Again Christian hearkening to the voice of a prayer warrior casting out demons.

As D-Day approached, the visits became more frequent. I was all the more encouraged by the open support for the SDF expressed by a group of Anglophone journalists on 'Cameroon Calling', a programme broadcast every Sunday morning by the state-owned news organ Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). These journalists included Aloysius Ntemfac Ofege, Beatrice Anembom Monju, Victor Epie Ngome and a contributor, Dr Tata Mentan. It was after the broadcast that many government employees began to turn to the SDF without fear. The journalists were arrested and sent to Kondengui Maximum Security Prison, one of the most-dreaded concentration camps in the country. The journalists instantly became heroes. The broadcast took place on 5 May 1990.

'Perfect calms at sea are usually the forerunners of a storm' says Henry Fielding. It was for this reason, he explains, that the ancients often offered sacrifices to Nemesis, a god considered to always cast an

invidious eye on human happiness and who derived a peculiar delight in overturning it.

Bamenda Town was uncommonly calm on the eve of the SDF's launch. Looking at city denizens going about their economic and social activities, a visitor to town needed to be a magician or a prophet to know or even imagine that anything spectacular would happen the next day.

Anthills are busy but nothing compared to Fru Ndi's Ntarinkon residence where the boldest of the opponents of the New Deal Government, myself among them, converged to plan the following day's events. All night long we designed slogans for the hundreds of placards to be used during the march to Liberty Square, the new name for City Chemist roundabout, where the launch was officially scheduled to take place. I retired home at 4 am to catch some sleep so as to be awake enough at the time of the launch, which promised to be more action-packed than most Hollywood movies.

It is common knowledge among authors that the best way to make any publication popular is to attract a ban on it. The ingenious publisher of a popular French-language newspaper in Cameroon was so grateful to the government every time his paper was banned that whenever the administration failed to do him this favour, he would employ policemen to seize copies of his papers in public places. The papers would sell like hot cakes after that, in the same way people scrambled for information concerning the SDF after the Bamenda administration banned its launch. The ban was repeatedly announced on the government media in the belief that the population would be too scared to come out on that day. The announcement instead aroused the curiosity of all who heard it and given that no private radio stations were operating in Cameroon at the time, Fru Ndi and his supporters were extremely grateful for the publicity the Biya regime was giving them. Fru Ndi was fortunate that the BBC and, later on, Gabon-based Africa No. 1, were very interested in the launch, much to the chagrin of the Biya regime. The deployment of combat-ready troops and water cannons gave Bamenda Town the semblance of a war zone where sometimes the excitement caused by military confrontations suppresses in civilians the fear of death. The heightened drama attracted more curious observers.

Not satisfied with the measures taken, security men in mufti took up positions in all the crowded areas like bars, restaurants and markets and took an active part in conversations during which they painted a frightful picture of the water cannons which they said contained poisonous liquid likely to produce severe itching on the body followed by death.

This did not produce the intended effect. In other words, far from deterring SDF supporters, these measures encouraged most of

those who had planned to go to their place of business or travel out of town to stay and see what would happen. They didn't realize that being spectators at the scene of an incident meant being part of the event. In fact, Juliet Sikod, one of those killed on 26 May 1990, was a spectator who was nowhere near the spot where the launch was expected to take place.

I was at Fru Ndi's residence as early as 8 am on 26 May. The crowd that assembled there was, however, nothing to write home about compared to that at Liberty Square, which was considered by many as the only venue where the launch could take place.

Fru Ndi took advantage of the fact that there were no troops to obstruct him. Accompanied by a crowd of less than 1000 supporters, he moved to Ntarinkon Park to launch the party. The moment he mounted the rostrum, which was in fact an old Land Rover, it began to rain. With a quickness of thought that rarely comes to many in embarrassing situations, Fru Ndi described the rains as 'a shower of blessing', a phrase Biya was to use in a similar weather situation in Bamenda. But though he apparently loved these 'showers of blessing', he didn't protest when Bernard Tabali, one of his early militants, held an umbrella over his head. Below is Fru Ndi's speech launching the SDF:

Fellow Cameroonians,

Today is the most significant day in the struggle for democracy in Cameroon. You are here in your numbers because you do not only have faith, but more so, because you are determined to ensure it works in Cameroon.

Thank you for that faith and determination. Make no mistake and don't allow yourself to be misled or misguided by anyone, no matter his station in life. Democracy has never been handed over to a people on a platter of gold!

For long you have heard several meanings attributed to democracy. Some of these have tended to justify tyrannies whether it is tyranny of the majority or tyranny of the minority. Whether we go back to Aristotle's Athens or we remain in the present with Abraham Lincoln's America, we find ourselves with a viable definition. That democracy is about people and the laws that they enact to govern themselves. And that you should know that the struggle for democracy is no easier today than it was in Greece 2,500 years ago.

In the context, we share the views of Archbishop Abel Muzorewa when he wonders aloud 'why is it that we Africans can go to Britain (and I here add Europe) and the United State of America and be free to criticize their government and heads of state without fear of disappearing the following night or of being deported. Why are we afraid of doing it in Africa? It is a heinous crime in Black Africa to open your mouth and talk about the doings of the government or head of state. You would get thrown in prison and accused of treason or simply disappear. In such states, political leaders do not trust their own people. They are

tyrannical in the sense that they will not allow criticism.'

And yet these same people whom they now oppress elect them. We say that democracy is about people because we believe that without the observance of the fundamental freedoms, namely the freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including the freedom of the press and other media of communication, freedom of peaceful assembly and the freedom of association, the people cannot be expected to enjoy their basic rights which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as human beings.

The fact that we have had to put up a hard struggle to hold this rally is abundant evidence that we have a long way to go in the democratic process.

Today we call on you to yell for democracy. For as someone has rightly said, '...unless people yell a lot, they get ignored'. You can't afford to get ignored. Your children's children will not get ignored tomorrow.

Whether those who govern us accept it or not, we believe, as others before us have believed and asserted that the essence of democracy is about local people controlling their day-to-day affairs.

Let us make this clear to all those who are hearing us today that, in the view of the SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT, the struggle will continue not only here, but anywhere in the world as long as there is someone who is governing and someone who is governed. This struggle can only stop when all the people participate in their own government.

But what we see today is that African leaders have cultivated the tendency to use the vocabulary of democracy to conceal modern forms of dictatorship. It is against this dictatorship and oppression that we join battle with anyone and we assure you today that we shall emerge victorious.

The SDF has included DEMOCRACY in its motto because of its fervent belief and conviction that the absence of the democratic process in any society means the denial of justice and the retardation of development. Because where the people are not free to go about their daily chores without undue molestations, they can't exhibit their skills and talents.

As we have just pointed out, we have to eschew any form of dictatorship because in contrast to a true democracy whereby the people decide what is good for them, dictatorships produce the following results in the words of Argentina's great blind writer, Jorge Luis Borges: 'oppression, servility, cruelty and more abominable, is the fact that they breed stupidity'.

We have to set as one of our goals to rid the Cameroonian society of a system that deprives it of being free, where men are punished for daring to think freely, associate freely, and assemble peacefully and freely. Let us assure anyone present here that our own view of democracy is one where the people will retain their power to speak, to decide and act in the overall interest of their own society. We are searching ways and means to secure the future for the generations that will follow us. And therefore 'to be democratic is to disagree about what democracy is'.

Finally, we call upon you to stand up and be counted amongst those who share

our democratic ideal. You have nothing to lose but the straightjacket in which, you, as freeborn citizens have been cast.
Long live the SDF!
Long live Cameroon!

Shower of Blessing or Curse?

A majority of Cameroonians agreed with Fru Ndi that the rain that fell at the time the launch was taking place was a shower of blessing. But there were others, Fru Ndi's political adversaries, who saw things differently.

This class of people saw the rain as Nature's disapproval of a human event which would lead to bloodshed and the destabilization of a peaceful nation. Kevin Kiven, a friend who always liked to see the other side of issues, recalled that in 1959, 31 years before the launch of the SDF, Mount Cameroon had erupted violently when J.N. Foncha, an advocate of unification between East and West Cameroon from the Northwest Province, beat E.M.L. Endeley, his rival from the Southwest to head the West Cameroon government that championed the cause of union with East Cameroon. The death of J.N. Foncha took place against the backdrop of another Mount Cameroon eruption and violent winds that tore down houses and destroyed crops in Anglophone Cameroon. On the day of his dismissal, a dark cloud — as often gathers before a rain storm — is reported to have risen from the east and moved to the west before returning to hover above Baforchu village, the birthplace of Simon Achidi Achu, Cameroon's prime minister from 1992-1998. The death of Albert Mukong, Cameroon's foremost human rights crusader and Anglophone nationalist, was preceded by the collapse of the bridge over the Mounjo River. It was in fact called Unification Bridge and many saw in the collapse the metaphorical end of the union between East and West Cameroon.

Those who may be tempted to sneer at such occurrences and confine them to the realms of superstition should recollect that there was darkness for three hours after the death of Christ, the curtain in the temple split into two, graves opened and the dead came out. Such recollection, I believe, is essential to the Christian faithful who may doubt the literary concept of pathetic fallacy or the credibility of Duncan's horses eating each other in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or the earthquake that followed the eating of the forbidden fruit by Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For such people, the rain that fell at Ntarinkon, far from being a sign of God's approval, was a sign of the Omnipotent's disapproval of an event that ushered in a period of senseless hardship, suffering and the death of Cameroonians.

In brief, Fru Ndi's challengers did not see it as signifying the end of suffering for Cameroonians (Suffer Don Finish) but as the beginning

of hardship (Suffer Dey Front). Those of us who had been on the job market for four years before the launch saw things differently. The event to us signified the dawn of a new era. Convinced that the blood of martyrs always waters the Tree of Liberty, many of us saw Biya leaving power within a matter of days. As I walked away from Ntarinkon Park, then fondly renamed Liberty Park after the event, I recalled the words of Williams, words in his poem *The French Revolution* as it appeared to enthusiasts in its day, 'Bliss was it on that dawn to be alive/ And to be young was very heaven'.

I arrived in Liberty Square at about 5 pm to meet the largest crowd I had ever seen. The crowd, the majority of who had come from Nkwen, were prevented from reaching Liberty Square by barricades manned by security officials. The gendarmes and policemen found it difficult to maintain their ground as the crowd mounted pressure on the barricades. The activists were as determined to take control of Liberty Square as the security men were that they should not.

I was in the crowd that stretched from Liberty Square to more than a hundred metres into Longla Street where there is easy access to Ntarinkon Park through Musang Quarters. I stood close to the gendarmes that defended the barricades and could clearly hear the words of provocation from the crowd 'Your guns are empty. You can't shoot even if you want to,' one SDF activist told a gendarme.

'You are all suffering in vain. *Gendarme di suffer, Biya di chop* (gendarmes are suffering and Biya is eating)' many of them sang. When words failed to provoke the gendarmes, stone-throwing followed. The stones came mainly from the SONAC street crowd. That was what obviously provoked the security forces and they began shooting. They were given permission to shoot after a round of tear gas more suffocating than those released before failed to disperse the crowd. The arrival of a military helicopter emitting twittering sounds that gave the impression of little explosives being dropped suggested more danger and the crowd began to disperse. Among the few that refused to be cowed was an elderly man who screamed and rushed towards the six youths sprawled on the ground whose intestines with blood flowing from the gaping holes in their bodies formed a small river similar to that formed by the red wine from a cask that burst in front of the wine shop of Madame Defarge in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. The involvement of elderly women in the struggle for democratic change, Fru Ndi's models, stemmed from this incident.

After the bloody drama in Liberty Square, no better option for drowning my sorrow presented itself than profuse drinking. And since my pockets were not well enough lined to enable me to purchase beer, I went to where I could get tipsy at moderate cost in Swine Quarters behind the

Bamenda municipal stadium. Here, Mami Regina's wine (*mbuh*) bar offered better prospects than any other because it was the favourite drinking spot of many of my teacher colleagues – James Tikum, Mathias Soh and Vincent Fon. Like most of the other drinking spots, Mami Regina's joint had a *mbuh* parlour and several smart-looking bar mates. Here, anybody could undergo the Drunkard's Metamorphosis without rebuke.

The Drunkard's Metamorphosis is a process whereby a rational, good-looking individual can be transformed into pig by drink. The first stage is transformation into a monkey. This means that after the first two litres or so, he begins to chatter like a monkey. He barks like a dog at whoever dares to challenge him when the number of litres has gone up to five. By the time he has consumed up to eight or nine litres, he falls asleep and starts snoring like a pig. This is one of the reasons why the place is called Swine Quarter. Another reason is that the area is very muddy during the rainy season. Before the new market was constructed, Swine Quarter could have qualified as the headquarters for the Organization of Mud-Exporting Countries, if or when mud becomes an exportable commodity. A trader from Pinyin, a business-inclined tribe in Santa Subdivision made the name stick when he brought and tethered pigs in the area. I was a regular customer at the bar and a strict adherent to the drinker's philosophy 'give to givers'. It was for this reason that I had more than sufficient to drink. By 11 pm, I was drunk yet did not leave for home. What kept me so long was not just the palm wine which like all alcoholic drinks has an addictive effect on the consumers. I was detained there partly by the jokes and music that kept the place lively. I remember in particular, a school headmaster who had an accordion. The song he played most often was called *Consider your Way* and was intended to rebuke those who engage in irresponsible activities like wining and wrenching. Martin Asabafor, a former schoolmate of blessed memory, had the inconvenience of being aroused by the music played very close to his ears while his limbs and eyes were soothed in slumber. Asabafor's case is memorable because he was dressed in very expensive *agbada* (traditional Nigerian attire) and looked highly respectable. There was another humorous drunk who had the habit of asking whoever called his name 'Do you have any tangibility that can correspond with my conceptions?'

Everybody, including even the unlearned, came to understand that he was asking: if anybody could give him a beer. Beer too was sold here. This request was granted nearly as many times as it was made. His real names I came to learn were Theophilus Tabufor but because of his propensity to 'devastate' listeners with loud sounding terms, few cared to know his real name. His closest friends simply knew him as 'T-Boy' although he was over sixty years old, while a majority called him Pa

Grammar. To ensure a steady flow of drinks each time he came, Pa Grammar came each day armed with fresh terminology. That evening, he came clearly inspired by the new wave of excitement resulting from the launch of the SDF. 'Stop this bunkum!' he told a group of young political activists who had just arrived and were on their first five litres of palm wine. 'Go tell the headache of state (here he meant head of state) that he is a gentocrat and that if I had my way I could banish him with his zygoties of iguanas to Obiang Nguema's Devil Island. Tell him he is an irredentist and I will no longer withstand his annexationist and imperialistic tendencies.' There was much laughter and the young men immediately fulfilled their obligation to him. 'Give him one man' was the audible instruction to the barmaid at the counter. He was given a bottle of beer. The barmaids were especially amused and always sat by him or teased him to speak more 'grammar'. When none immediately appeared this evening he feigned great anger because of the neglect. 'Come here, you limaceous endomorph' he shouted at one of them passing. When she came, he thundered at her 'you mammiferous specimen. Your medulla oblongata is surely pounding because you consumed prodigious quantities of tequila last night.'

Not all those who made regular visits here only came to drink. Most of them had lascivious eyes for the barmaids whom they endeavoured to impress by drinking beer instead of palm wine. The barmaids knew this and so never cautioned against excessive 'boozing'. The barmaid's conduct had the tacit approval of their employers, the mother strumpets who owned the drinking spots. These mother strumpets knew that drunken customers slept more and thus gave less trouble in bed where most of them ended with the barmaids. Besides it didn't matter how much damage beer or palm wine did to the consumers. All she valued was the profit she made.

It was also immaterial to the mother strumpets what happened after the bar closed. Stories of customers being attacked by bandits as they staggered home were received with laughter and scorn rather than pity. But the real significance of Swine Quarter lay in the fact that it was a school for political education. John Fru Ndi had no access to the government-owned news media but needed to issue press releases, which his supporters readily distributed for free in bars. The bars in Swine Quarters disseminated the information faster than those elsewhere because of proximity. *The Cameroon Post*, then the only functioning Anglophone newspaper did much despite censorship. The BBC and the Gabon-based Africa No. 1 Radio did the most in covering the preparations for the SDF's launch and in the aftermath of the event gave worldwide coverage of the indignities of the Biya regime. Drinking spots were particularly useful for John Fru Ndi because the people discussed

information they had got from the press and there were committed militants ready to collect press releases from Ntarinkon without expecting to be rewarded for the service. Newspapers, many of which soon sprang up like mushrooms at the start of the rainy season, also sold out by simply putting Fru Ndi's picture on the front page. It was from there that the SDF national chairman conceived and nurtured the notion that anything positive written about him or his party was a marketable product. It was only after Pro-SDF publications like the *SDF Echo* or *The Standard* manned by his own communications officials first had an epileptic turn and later died that Fru Ndi started coming to terms with the bitter fact that the reality of the situation was not always reported.

I got up the following day in really bad shape. What remained a miracle was how I got home in the first place. I faintly remembered the words of Mami Regina telling us she wanted to lock her door and go to sleep and around 11:30 pm and my colleagues told me *mbub* bars were still open at Old Church Junction, a kilometre away.

We arrived there and found the place still bubbling with life. After a brief discussion we finally pitched camp at Auntie Emilia's bar. I remember having a glass of something, going out to relieve myself and jumping into another taxi that left me at Nsamukom Hall, a popular spot for fans of bottle dance. Bottle dance is a popular form of entertainment among the people of Mankon and the neighbouring Baforchu village. It is danced by couples, the man and woman often holding hands, while one of the vocalists gives instructions on how they should move their feet and when to hold onto or let go of each other. Electric guitars back up the vocals.

It was daybreak. I was still pondering on my moral degradation: getting drunk everyday not from beer but by consuming 'swine *mimbo*', when I heard a knock at my door. At first I thought it was one of those 'fishers of men', those desperate females who prey on bitter-leaf soup and 'foot cow' eaters like me. I therefore armed myself with invectives to devastate any audacious slut. I was surprised on opening the door to see but my friend, George Fointama, himself no early riser. He told me that Evaristus Toje, his nephew, had not been seen since the launch took place and said he had been to all his relatives and the homes of Toje's friends. There was no clue concerning his whereabouts. He was later to find Toje's body in the mortuary at Bamenda hospital with several bullets lodged in his pelvis. I later also learnt that Toje had a premonition of his fate and that before leaving the house that morning, the ill-fated youth had told his family members he was not sure he would return. All attempts to prevent him from going proved abortive and his family was left with no alternative than to plead with his friends to ensure he didn't get hurt.

I deemed it necessary to give the above account, especially the fact that bullets were found in his body because of the cacophony from the CRTV that the six youths who died at Liberty Square were trampled upon. John Fru Ndi, I learnt, contributed financially towards the purchase of a coffin for him but didn't go for the burial.



Unwise Men From The East

Reactions to the news of the SDF's launch were numerous and varied. Just as many worshippers, among them angels from Heaven, poured into Bethlehem to greet Jesus Christ the Messiah, asthousands poured into Bamenda. This was concrete proof that a political party had been launched but unlike the Wise Men from the East who came to worship Christ, not all those who streamed into Ntarinkon came to worship and adore the new political baby.

John Fru Ndi later told all those who cared to hear it t the government had offered him a bribe of FCFA 3 billion to drop the SDF idea and flee to Nigeria. His militants instantly believed the story for reasons that I do not deem important to elaborate on.

First, without being a traditional ruler or even a prince, his residence was suddenly referred to as 'Ntarinkon Palace', a way of equating it with Unity Palace (State House) .This was also the beginning of Fru Ndi's deification and a personality cult that was later to make any opposing ideas to his an antiparty activity.

Another significant observation concerns the FCFA 3 billion alleged to have been offered to Fru Ndi. Cameroonians had such a negative impression of the Biya regime that they were ready to believe anything scandalous reported about it. Even financial experts, who knew that FCFA 3 billion was too great an amount to carry about, decided not to question the truth of the story for fear of incurring the wrath of Fru Ndi's diehard supporters, especially in the North West Province. Nobody was bold enough to say he didn't see the emperor's new clothes.

The story of the rejected FCFA 3 billion did however cause Fru Ndi's popularity to soar to such heights that anything he said was taken as Gospel truth. In fact one way of saying something was the truth was to say it came from Fru Ndi.

The official audio-visual news organ, CRTV, played the most significant part in ensuring Fru Ndi became the darling of the public. Besides broadcasting the false information that the six youths who lost their lives were trampled upon, CRTV claimed that 10,000 of the people who took part in the SDF launch were Nigerians who sang the Nigerian

national anthem. The government wish to hear the last of Fru Ndi was betrayed by the announcement that Fru Ndi had escaped to Nigeria, which was contrary to the truth.

Pity never ceases to be shown to those who make the people's suffering their own. Fru Ndi had proven that he was ready to die to rid Cameroon of the Biya dictatorship and few doubted him. When therefore he said he was the target of arrest and threats of liquidation for standing up to the Biya regime, those ready to die for him were legion.

The reactions of some top Anglophones to the launch also gave Fru Ndi the moral courage he desperately needed to forge ahead, despite all the government's efforts to deter him. John Ngu Foncha, the vice president of the ruling CPDM party and Grand Chancellor of the Order of Valour – a prestigious though sinecure position – announced his resignation from both posts. Such a thing had never happened before. Christian Tumi, Cameroon's lone cardinal, openly defended the SDF's launch. Another moral force.

Dr Foncha's resignation was of utmost significance because its announcement was accompanied by declarations highly injurious to the Biya regime. Most memorable was his complaint that he was often spitefully treated, denied an audience with the head of state and invited to meetings only by radio. He therefore felt no better than window dressing (irrelevant).

The immediate cause, as recounted by eyewitnesses, was the shabby treatment given him by security forces. The men in uniform not only searched the elderly statesman with the thoroughness deserved only by terrorism suspects but scornfully remarked '*Foncha c'est qui?*' (Who is Foncha?).

Of course all adult Cameroonians knew Foncha's contribution to the unity of Cameroon. They knew that Cameroon, a former German colony spelt Kamerun had been handed over to Britain and France to administer as trust territories by the League of Nations after Germany's defeat in the Second World War. The Kamerun Democratic National Party (KNDP) which was formed and headed by Foncha, had campaigned for unification with French Cameroon I in 1961. As compensation, Foncha was given the post of vice president which he turned into that of premier of West (Anglophone) Cameroon. Cameroon's first president, Amadou Ahidjo, later replaced Foncha in the two posts with Solomon Tandeng Muna, a fellow Anglophone under circumstances that to date remain the subject of controversy, especially within the ranks of Anglophone activists.

Cardinal Tumi's open support for the SDF's launch was significant for Fru Ndi because he was the most authoritative voice in the Catholic Church and Cameroon's lone cardinal.

It is worth noting here that as Fru Ndi's image, charisma and popularity soared with each passing day, so too did the government panic. Government agents who swarmed the bars and other areas where the SDF was the topic of discussion wanted to know who the hidden forces were that were backing him. They were convinced that, as Chinua Achebe would put it, Fru Ndi was just 'a little bird dancing in the middle of the road' whose 'drummer was in the nearby bush'. Those of us who were close to Fru Ndi knew that there was no foreign backing and that the SDF's launch was the outcome of good planning and naked courage.

Before the SDF project was made public, a Douala-based Lawyer by the name of Yondo Black had championed a move to launch a political party and was arrested alongside his collaborator, Albert Mukong who claimed the idea came from him. The government defended its act by saying Yondo Black and his group were arrested not for trying to form a political party but for insulting the head of state. They were later released.

The ten SDF founding fathers, among them Albert Mukong, a well-known opponent of Ahidjo and Biya regimes, capitalized on this defence and boldly went ahead with making public its political agenda. The government was left with no option but to prevent the launch itself.

I was a member of Fru Ndi's think tank, those he consulted before taking major decisions, being the secretary of the Meta Quarters Ward of the SDF whose president was Joseph Mbidzenyuy, a teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes College Mankon, Bamenda. All those who later became heroes in the SDF, many of them civil servants who feared losing their posts of responsibility or businessmen dreading victimization, could only peep through loopholes at Ntarinkon Palace. Christened the 'Hunting Dogs', we planned strategies.

As the days and weeks passed without Fru Ndi being arrested, they grow more courageous or gave this impression, as most of them still walked on tip toes to Ntarinkon.

There were also many stories circulating about Fru Ndi, among them the story that he was a superman and was bullet-proof and capable of appearing and disappearing. Some of these stories were even published in newspapers which soon became popular, since reality in the opinion of many people was what was reported in the press. *The Weekly Post*, a paper known to be anti-Fru Ndi, could not resist the temptation of publishing a juicy story alleging that the eight attempts to kill Fru Ndi had flopped. Like most of my colleagues in the press, I was more of a supporter than a reporter. Whenever I wrote a piece of panegyric on the SDF or its chairman or castigated the Biya regime, I saw myself as a potential Nelson Mandela, especially when people told me I would soon be arrested for criticizing the head of state. One of the pieces I remember having

received much applause for was a news analysis titled 'In Defence of Fru Ndi's Miracles' which was published by *Cameroon Today*, a newspaper owned by Francis Wache. In the analysis, I likened Fru Ndi to Jesus Christ and portrayed him as somebody beyond human destruction. CPDM militants went underground as the SDF grew from strength to strength and Fru Ndi was increasingly viewed as a Messiah, Moses or Joshua.

Of course, I knew Fru Ndi was not the mystical figure people viewed him as. I knew him just as a courageous and intelligent man who understood the principle that in any dispute, if you stand your grounds, your opponent is sure to give way. We never wanted him arrested but not trusting the Biya regime to exercise restraint, encouraging the supernatural stories about Fru Ndi kept government agents at bay. The security men, especially those of Anglophone and Bamilike origin, who sympathized with the SDF project also knew Fru Ndi was no superman. The Bamilikes in particular, who had lived in the Maquisard era, knew that the best means of preserving a leader was to invent and uphold myths, which portrayed him as invincible.

Stories of that nature had been circulated about freedom fighters like Reuben Um Nyobe, Albert Kingue, Ernest Ouandie and NdehNtumazah even by security men who sympathized with their struggle. By saying somebody could appear and disappear, the security men justified their inability to arrest that individual. Ntumazah tells us in his book *Ndeh Ntumazah-A Conversational Autobiography* that the security men at the height of the struggle by L'Union de Populations du Cameroun (UPC), Cameroons saw him drive in and out of Bamenda but pretended not to have done so because they didn't want to disturb the cause he was fighting for. Following the same argument, Ntumazah supporters attributed his escape from a bomb blast that shattered his residence in Ghana in 1965 to information from supporters.

Fru Ndi knew that stories about his possession of mystical powers were necessary for his protection as they would scare potential assassins and therefore made no attempt to refute them or discourage their publications. By so doing, Fru Ndi conveyed a lie without suffering the guilt of telling one. A lie of omission, to put it another way. Bouba Bello Maigari, chairman of L'Union de la Democratie et le Progres, later improved on this ingenious political strategy. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gave food aid to victims of famine in the northern rovinces. In making the radio announcement, the broadcaster used only the abbreviation and made no effort to distinguish between the UNDP the party and the UNDP the programme. Bello, of course, took advantage of the ambiguity and made political capital out of it.

I had to introduce this digression on Fru Ndi's alleged mystical powers to substantiate the accusation that the press helped to mould a deity and power monster out of an ordinary politician to the detriment of democracy and the SDF announced a mission of change.

The party's advent also enabled Cameroonians to see another aspect of Paul Biya which they had been ignorant of: unpredictability. After allowing CPDM militants to march and sing *Dimabola* against precipitated multiparty democracy and the CRTV to ridicule Fru Ndi, Biya embarrassed his supporters on 28 June 1990. The occasion was a CPDM extraordinary congress. While everyone expected him to denounce the new party and promise sanctions on its leadership, Biya took everyone aback by announcing that henceforth they should be prepared to face competition. 'Our party is strong, no doubt, but henceforth you should be prepared to face competition' is the translated version of the pronouncement. This shocking announcement, according to Fru Ndi loyalists, provoked an immediate headache in Emah Basile, a government delegate to the Yaoundé Urban Council, who doubled as CPDM treasurer. As the pronouncement was in favour of the SDF's existence, few persons bothered to seek medical confirmation to the effect that an embarrassing announcement should cause head rather than heartache. It may also be necessary to state here that there was more wishful thinking in what was circulated as news than truth or logic.

Of course, the fanatics carried the day because they were in the majority and the press, which knew the public, would go for anything that glorified Fru Ndi, and thought verification a sheer waste of time and money. The government made things worse for itself by practicing censorship. Newspapers were required to deposit dummies of their publications at the DO's office before publication.

In short, in the struggle for its own freedom, the press omitted its duty of educating the public and politicians. When the legalization of political parties began and the SDF was not among the press but joined SDF fanatics and the masses to castigate the government instead of finding out what should be done. Within the SDF, tempers flared because many could not come to terms with the fact that the little-known Cameroon Ideological Party, known by its French acronym, the DIC, should be legalized before the SDF. Though Fru Ndi's party had some of the lawyers, magistrates and experts, only one person had a clear idea of what should be done: Ben Muna.

It was Ben Muna who explained to Fru Ndi and collaborators that in order for the SDF to have a truly legal status within the Cameroon system it had to be registered afresh. He said the pronouncement that the SDF launch in 1990 was an illegal party could not be removed. It took some hard persuasion for this argument to sink into the minds of Fru Ndi

and his fanatical followers. But sink in it did and an SDF delegation of 19 people deposited fresh documents with the Northwest governor in early 1991. The party was instantly legalized. Ben Muna was part of the delegation and could, with justification, call himself a founding father of the SDF. This right was later to be the subject of hostile disputes with proponents of reason and those of sentiment between Muna's supporters and Fru Ndi's fanatics, among them the legal adviser Joseph Mbah Ndam. Despite this rational explanation, the fanatics continue to hold that the founding fathers of the SDF are the ten men who sat down to draw up a constitution and the launch of the old (illegal) SDF.

To conclude the second chapter of our work, I feel it is necessary to observe here that every political set-up or dictatorial regime has the ingredients of its own destruction. The SDF was launched in blood but its leadership thought that because human sacrifice was made, it was bound to succeed within a short time even if the (wrong) decisions were taken. Until the fanaticism within the party's militancy with which some individuals are stigmatized and the sins of the father always visited on the children is 'finally and permanently discredited' to echo Bob Marley, the SDF will continue to remain a house divided. It is needless to go beyond saying that a house divided can never stand.



Murdering The ‘Insurgents’

‘There can be no democracy without democrats.’ This observation is so prosaic and matter of fact that every sound mind would doubt why it should be quoted as if it were some well-coined aphorism. It is one of such observations of Paul Biya about which there was a great cacophony in the official media as if it was the wittiest thing ever said.

It is worth mentioning it here because the author of the statement who is also the author or rather writer of *Communal Liberalism*, certainly meant the opposite of what he said. The difference between an author and a writer was first brought to light by a renowned columnist who chose Rodcod Gobata as his pen name and since he has not yet given me the authority to disclose his real names, I don’t consider it safe or prudent to do so. But as I understand him, an author is the originator of an idea while the writer is s/he who puts it in writing. He then argued that while the writer of *Communal Liberalism* was known; its authorship was still a matter of conjecture.

1991 was the year in which Biya implemented the opposite of democracy when he rejected the idea of a sovereign national conference advocated by students of the University of Yaoundé and embraced by the coordination of political parties and associations formed in 1991. Biya should have accepted the idea and put in place modalities that could have led to his maintaining his grip on power. But apparently, Gilbert Andze Tsoungui, Emah Basil and the ultra conservatives within the CPDM party persuaded him to see such a conference as a civilian tribunal intended to try those at the top of the regime. He thus missed the opportunity to persuade Cameroonians that he was genuine in his claim of having brought democracy to the country. His refusal resulted in senseless bloodshed and irreparable damage for the economy.

The destruction began at the University of Yaoundé where the students who had formed a union popularly called *Parlement* in French, demonstrated against the idea of paying fees. They argued that their predecessors not only were not subjected to this ordeal but were instead given bursaries (a monthly allowance). The chancellor, Agbor Tabi,

employed an unprecedented form of ruthlessness to suppress the protests. One student, Collins Kamga, lost his life as a result of the dispute over paying fees. The university administration and the students traded accusations over the killing which by all accounts was orchestrated by the authorities to make students understand the risks of continuing to reject the fee idea. The University of Yaoundé crisis brought to light such monstrosities as the presence of government spies on campus. One of them by name Daniel Ebale Angounou, who claimed to be 'Biya's young friend' later exposed the government's interest in an interview with *Le Messager*, a renowned French-language newspaper in Cameroon and later in a 97-page book, *Paul Biya, the Nightmare of My Life*, written while in detention in Kondengui's maximum security prison. It was perhaps the triumph of the regime in this particular university crisis that gave it the wrong notion that nothing better than ruthlessness was necessary for the suppression of student riots. This notion was to suffer a serious setback as will be seen in the course of this narration.

On the political front, battles were equally rugged and bloody, for example, when the newly formed Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations launched the Operation Ghost Towns and Civil Disobedience Campaigns that were intended to bring the regime to its knees. Seven of the ten Cameroonian provinces embraced the operation conceived by Mboua Massosk who hailed from Douala. It was intended to be a peaceful form of protest against the Biya regime's refusal to democratize the country. Businesses were to be closed from Mondays to Fridays and taxis were prohibited from being on the streets. Cameroonians were also required to refuse the payment of taxes to a regime that the opposition considered as unaccountable as it was undemocratic.

Pursuing such a programme meant enormous sacrifices by business operators, which was why most of them were unwilling to abide by the plan. The opposition was therefore reduced to the necessity of using brute force to implement it. This move was championed by the enigmatic Djeukam Tchameni whose human rights group, Carpe Liberté, employed hit-and-run tactics and demonstrated other exceptional skills in coping with the gendarmerie. Carpe Liberté introduced the idea of red and yellow cards. This innovation stigmatized anyone whom it deemed not cooperative with the democratic struggle by simply announcing that a card had been issued to such a person. Within a short time, the fear of the red card became the beginning of wisdom.

To break the opposition's strike, the government devised diverse tactics. It started by attempting to force all business operators in the major towns like Douala, Bafoussam, Maroua, Garoua, Ngaoundere and Bamenda to open their business premises. But it failed woefully in this

objective. Limited success was registered only in the transportation sector. Since the opposition parties had 'decreed' that only taxis should park, many taxi owners converted their vehicles into private cars and thus succeeded in carrying passengers without being harassed. But when private vehicles became too numerous, opposition activists began to target those it suspected were carrying passengers. The government then had to resort to another strategy and bought several taxis and assigned armed security men to drive them. This was particularly the case in Doula. Paul Atanga Nji, an ambitious youth who had condemned the SDF's launch the moment it took place, told me he bought more than 100 taxis and gave them to the government to combat the Ghost Town Operation, but I later learnt that the correct figure was 72. Clashes between security men in multi who were driving cars and opposition activists resulted in severe injuries and sometimes even death. The climax of the anti-government protests was on 15 July 1991 when the coordination decided to embark on a suicidal invasion of Yaoundé to tell Biya that he should give up power. They began by issuing a press release and holding rallies advising residents of Yaoundé to evacuate the capital city. Fru Ndi led the protesters from Doula.

But it was like the biblical hyperbole of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. The nation's armed forces, the police and gendarmes were mobilized to stop what the Biya regime saw as a civilian *coup d'état*. One of those who attempted the journey to Yaoundé alongside others from Bamenda said they were stopped at a small town called Tonga, searched, interrogated and warned by Brigadier Pierre Semengue, the Army Chief of Staff himself, who arrived at the scene by helicopter.

Finally, nothing of political significance came out of the trip except that it proved how cowardly the Biya regime was. The regime actually thought opposition supporters were rebels because, to its top officials, it was far beyond the bounds of common sense to attempt a march to Yaoundé without being armed.

While in the rest of the country opposition action was sporadic, in the Northwest Province, especially in Bamenda Town, plans of action were religiously followed. It began with rallies three times a week in Liberty Square. Later, protests extended to five times a week with Takumbeng women (women who had reached the menopause) marching naked. Clashes with security forces left several wounded or dead. Security men used the prevailing political situation to settle scores with people who either refused to bribe them or who had outsmarted them in the domain of love. Colonel Guillaum Pom, Northwest Legion Commander at the time rejected accusations by Fru Ndi and fellow opposition supporters that those being killed were unarmed citizens. He defined the word 'arms' as anything that could cause harm either physically or

psychologically. In this sense, Takumbeng women walking naked with leaves in their mouths were as harmful as those throwing stones at gendarmes or the police during protest marches because the women showed no fear of the gun, meaning they had a counter weapon or antidote to it. Their very conduct, the colonel was quoted as saying, frightened or demoralized the security men who were convinced that they would collapse and die if they opened fire. In addition, the Takumbeng women played the part of Fru Ndi's bodyguard and nobody endeavours to protect another without an adequate weapon of self-defence.

The sudden death of a gendarme at Fru Ndi's compound during the state of emergency that was imposed on Bamenda a year later helped to buttress Pom's argument (see Chapter Four).

Even when attacked by daring police and gendarmes using truncheons, gendarmes, who feared or did not deem it necessary to kill women, the Takumbeng women fought back with their sticks, injuring their assailants in the process, which lent credence to Pom's argument that they were not without arms.

Black Wednesday

The climax of the confrontation between the SDF and the security forces reached its summit on Wednesday 2 October 1991. In a determined effort to stop the anti-government protests, the SDO for Mezam, Bell Luc, who was a police officer by training, sent combat-ready troops to storm Fru Ndi's residence. No official reason was given but, given the brutality exhibited towards Fru Ndi and his diehard supporters, it is easy to conclude that the idea was to make the SDF chairman realize that he could be eliminated if government wanted to do so. The attack on Fru Ndi's residence ended with the chairman and his followers leading a protest march to Nkwen, the indisputable headquarters of anti-government protesters in Bamenda. Because of the dogged determination of Nkwen denizens, the quarter was nicknamed 'Bagdad'. Before the protesters reached Mile Two in the centre of Bagdad, the Mercedes Benz in which Fru Ndi was being chauffeur driven was set on fire by gendarmes. This happened minutes after the chairman had got out of it and the incident reinforced the view of Fru Ndi as some sort of superman. For the rest of the march, and with Fru Ndi then on foot, a helicopter flying just above the heads of the demonstrators dropped explosives which many erroneously believed were grenades, targeting Fru Ndi.

His supporters protected him as much as they could, sometimes pulling him into gutters and acting as human shields. (Fru Ndi later announced at a rally that he found some of these supposed grenades in his hat, much to the admiration of his teeming supporters who got the

idea that their chairman was beyond human destruction.)

At the Agric Field in Nkwen, as I heard later because I had chosen to monitor events in town, he addressed his followers, condemning what he described as the excessive brutality of the Biya regime. He resolved to continue the struggle for change in Cameroon but cautioned supporters that they should try to keep out of harm's way.

Back in the centre of the town, a drama of an entirely different kind was taking place. A group of protesters calling themselves 'Chop Fire' or 'Fire Eaters' singing anti-government songs, marched with the corpse of a colleague who had been shot by a gendarme to the DO's residence where they dumped it. 'Eat it!' one of them told the DO before they dispersed.

All over the town and particularly in Fru Ndi's Ntarinkon residence, explosives were dropped from an overhead helicopter which some of the ignorant militants picked up mistaking them for teargas canisters. I physically restrained one of my colleagues from picking up one of the dropped explosives. 'Don't you see that it has burnt a flower? What sort of teargas can do such damage?' I asked him, reproachfully. The dropping of the explosives earned Bell Luc Rene, who later became the Northwest governor, the derogatory nickname 'Bend Look Grenade'. Fru Ndi was later to accuse gendarmes of forcing his militants to pick up the explosives at gunpoint, which was, as indicated above, not true. Nothing but sheer foolhardiness and fanaticism caused the grenade victims to commit such buffoonery.

1991 is also memorable because of an emotional speech Biya made in an extraordinary session of the one-party parliament, announcing that the sovereign national conference, which the opposition demanded, was '*sans objet*', meaning it was of no value. He was so angry that he forgot to walk on the red carpet outside the Assembly.

Interestingly, he became very sober afterwards, even looking repentant after the speech and expressing a desire to meet the opposition, which had since resolved to meet him only as a group to prevent any of them from 'chopping soya', a popular expression used for taking bribes.

But Biya's close aides, notably those from the Essingan, an exclusively Beti assembly that acted as a moral force behind Biya rejected the idea of succumbing to the Coordination's demands. The opposition leaders who were already in Yaoundé waiting for the meeting, returned disappointed when it became obvious that the President would not receive them as a group.

The cowardly nature of most of the opposition leaders was demonstrated by their conduct in the face of banned protest marches. After one of these such marches in Yaoundé, Fru Ndi substantiated, amidst much laughter from militants, the white livered behaviour of

fellow opposition leaders. During a chat with them in my presence, the SDF chairman recounted how the opposition had planned the march much earlier but when it was time, most of the political leaders started complaining about the presence of security men and worse still, that of an overhead helicopter. 'If you don't want to move, I will march alone,' Fru Ndi claimed to have told them and started moving. Seeing that no security official was proceeding to arrest him, the other leaders followed, but still visibly scared.

The leaders had sufficient reason to be shy. Some, among them Jean Jacques Ekindi, the president of the Progressive Movement Party and the octogenarian, Samuel Ebuja, a former secretary had been arrested not long before and beaten on their feet by hooded torture experts. For obvious reasons, Fru Ndi had not been touched. One reason was the physical difficulty of extracting the SDF chairman from the midst of his teeming supporters who were always with him either at Ntarinkon or when he was on the road.

Nothing lasts forever, not even a popular and well-founded revolution like that of the French which began in 1789 but ended with the smell of gunpowder, when the young artillery officer, Napoleon Bonaparte, ended the invincibility of the Paris mob in 1793 by ordering his soldiers to open fire.

Biya was to succeed in breaking the Ghost Town Operation, not by opening fire on opposition leaders as Napoleon did with the mob but through the tactics of a fox, which Machiavelli, who we will come back to later, recommended as the most logical strategy when force fails. He announced a tripartite conference to discuss what would have been addressed at a national conference. Most opposition supporters were in favour of the idea but many were convinced that the opposition leaders would convert it into a national conference. They underestimated the Biya regime. Before anybody could say 'Jack Robinson', most of the opposition leaders had signed a document accepting that the Ghost Town Operation be called off. Many of them mocked Fru Ndi who suspected a trap and refused to sign. One of them insulted Fru Ndi, describing him as a 'semi-illiterate who knew nothing about documents', and boasted in the presence of Fru Ndi that he himself had 'a PhD and [was] an expert in the signing of international accords'.

What was later presented in Parliament was almost the opposite of what the political leaders had signed. The signatories cried foul but couldn't deny their signatures that the regime's experts had carefully scanned and used on an impressively pro-government accord.

The Ghost Town and civil disobedience campaigns, the only weapon they could have used to twist the regime's arms, had ended. Opposition leaders were dispersed. The press accelerated the break up

through interviews in which various leaders pointed accusing fingers at each other for the failure of the joint political venture. In short, seeing that their political Tower of Babel had collapsed, they sat like victims of hypnotism and watched the Biya regime dictate a pace of political reform that was anything but swift. Although the regime had succeeded in crushing the Operation Ghost Towns and civil disobedience campaign, it hadn't forgiven Northwesterners for championing it. The little town of Ndu in Donga-Mantung Division was to pay the price for the province's adherence to the SDF.



The Ndu Genocide

‘Political language is bad language’ wrote George Orwell in his essay titled ‘Politics and the English Language’ when he was condemning the subjectivity that dominates political speeches and partisan newspaper reports. He omitted to include the hypocrisy that characterizes diplomatic language that is a subset of the former. This gap was filled by Jeffery Hughes, an Australian writer and the author of *I Accuse*, a book supremely sympathetic towards the sufferings of Anglophone Cameroonians. According to Hughes, diplomats, under the pretext of good manners or gentlemanliness, avoid calling things by their true names.

It is obvious for this reason that the United Nations is reluctant to qualify as genocide the massive killings in Dafur that are being carried out by the Janjaweed militia sponsored by the regime that rules Sudan. World bodies easily describe as genocide the Holocaust during the Second World War in which over six million Jews were exterminated in Nazi concentration camps and the 1994 Rwandan Genocide in which an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were shot or hacked to death by extremist Hutus. These world bodies erroneously think hundreds of thousands or millions of lives have to be lost at a particular time or within a short duration for it to be termed genocide. They forget that although thousands of people may not be killed physically, a scene could be so devastating that it leaves an indelible mark on their psyche. Such persons may be described as psychologically dead, although still breathing, eating and talking. Between 6 and 12 June, an event occurred in the little town of Ndu in Donga-Mantung Division in the Northwest Province, details of which the world would have missed if two extraordinarily courageous persons had not braved all the odds to monitor and keep a record of. The two dreadnoughts are Michael Ndi, a journalist, and Denis Maimo, a photographer. Maimo committed suicide after he witnessed the event. He did not want to ever set eyes on a gendarme again.

In view of the atrocities committed in Ndu within that one week, I have decided to uphold the view that it was genocide, in open defiance

of all the barking diplomats in the world. *Naked Truth about that Ndu Genocide (The Tongue of an Eyewitness)* by Michael Ndi, one of the valiant human rights defenders just mentioned, is my principal source of inspiration in the story that follows.

Genesis of the Carnage

Although the genocide effectively took place in June 1992, the root causes began a year earlier.

On 20 May 1991, the hardcore opposition parties which since initiated Operation Ghost Towns and the civil disobedience campaigns, decreed a 'zero 20 May celebration' (20 May is Cameroon's national day). The opposition stalwarts of Ndu and its peripheries, notably Ngarum, fanatically blocked outlets from Ndu prohibiting the movement of people to and from Nkambe, the divisional headquarters of Donga-Mantung, for the national day celebrations. Mighty stones, burning tires and the bodywork of worn-out vehicles were mounted, especially on the Ndu-Nkamebe highway. Placards such as 'No more 20th May Celebration in Nkamebe', 'Ndu is Over Ripe for a Sub-Division'.

'We want a National Conference' and 'Enough is Enough Biya' were posted on all the walls along Ndu Motor Park.

By 2.05, the Fon of Ndu, who had sneaked out to Nkambe for the national day, arrived in the smoky, barricaded Ndu town with Nkambe administrative officials. The Fon was visibly as angry with his people for humiliating him by trying to check his movements, as the people were with him for defying the 20 May boycott decision. The Fon was all the more vexed that opposition activists refused him right of passage by ignoring his call for the dislodgement of the barricades so his car could pass. He was therefore reduced to trekking across the motor park to the Travellers Lodge, a popular hotel at the time. The journey was not undertaken in silence. The Fon called on his people to give peace and dialogue a chance. He might as well have been addressing the rolling hills of Wainama or any other inanimate objects. When the population chose to respond, it was by booing and jeering the Fon, a type of indignity which no human being can bear even if he or she is the most hardened stoic philosopher. Women joined the men in making an idiot of their traditional ruler, thereby making his humiliation all the greater.

The following day, at 11 am precisely, a fire brigade helicopter hovered over Ndu town for close to ten minutes and finally landed on the CBC school field. Extremist SDF supporters besieged the helicopter which was carrying military personnel in uniform. They, however, didn't take offence but disarmed the aggressive-looking SDF supporters by explaining politely that they had got a message from the Nkambe Administration and Donga-Mantung CPDM parliamentarians that Ndu

Market, the palace of the Fon of Ndu, and the homes of Hon. Tala Kwalar and Pa Ngala , a CPDM central committee member, were all in flames. Having realized that it was nothing but a false alarm, they saw no logic in prolonging their stay and took off again.

On 6 June 1991 some SDF militants who were termed either 'settlers' or 'strangers' in Ndu received 'Nkeng, the traditional convocation plant, to appear in Ndu Fon's palace within forty-eight hours.

On receipt of the convocation, the news ran the length and breadth of Ndu that Hon. Talla Kwalar, Pa Ngala A.T and Shey Dan Kimah had advised the Fon of Ndu to oust them from town. 'Subjects with destructive politics' was the appellation given to these SDF supporters.

Early in the morning of *Ntalab* at the small market of Ndu, the aforementioned SDF militants accompanied by family members thronged Ndu Fon's palace. The date was 8 June 1991. While there, some who claimed to have contributed to the building of Ndu Fon's palace threatened to dismantle it should the Fon attempt to banish them. At about 12.20, Hon. Talla Kwalar, Pa Ngala A.T (a CPDM central committee member), Shey Dan Kimah, some Ndu Fon's and seven black-headed *jujus chumbob*, emerged on the palace rostrum. Sensing danger, the Fon's pages withheld any belligerent words and merely warned everybody in Ndu who was out to see the town crumble. The mammoth crowd that had turned out in trucks and cars and on motorbikes left booing and chanting an anti Talla Kwalar and Pa Ngala A.T. song.

The conflict assumed dangerous proportions 30 June 1991 when Hon. Talla Kwalar unbelievably tried to force traders to open their business premises and if they failed to do so, he resorted to intimidation and actually drew a pistol that he brandished at flabbergasted onlookers. 'We, parliamentarians,' he said, 'have been authorized to shoot any persons obstructing others from selling.' But no sooner had he uttered these words than the sky opened and torrential rain started to fall. That kind of rain, my friend Dr Henry Jick told me, descended on a hypocritical government delegation during the burial of Mongo Beti whose parliamentary bid the Biya regime had frustrated because he wanted to contest the election on an SDF ticket.

But whereas the aforementioned delegation had sought shelter, the seemingly demented Ndu parliamentarian did what we used to describe in high school (CCAST Bambili) as 'taming the rain'. He stood on the same spot still brandishing his gun. This was to many not just ridiculous but an ill omen which foretold doom. It is reported that to escape the wrath to come, many witnesses of this unedifying drama left Ndu soon after for another destination where they could enjoy the

pleasures of peaceful coexistence after having lost any semblance of it in their town of origin. They were all the more inclined to do so because this bizarre act took place near the sacred tree where the ancestors of the town were reported to live and they were not likely to forgive such sacrilege.

On 5 March 1992, many letters supposedly written and signed by the CPDM president for Donga-Mantung Hon. Samuel Ngeh Tamfu littered Ndu Town. Whoever brought them in is still a mystery but the letter kept the victims on their toes.

C.P.D.M SECTION PRESIDENT
DONGA MANTUNG DIVISION

03-03-92

The Senior Divisional Officer
Ndonga Mantung Division

Sir,

I want to note with a lot of dismay the unpatriotic attitude of some people in this area who carried on threats on free citizens who came out to vote for the Legislative elections of March 1992.

They further go round forcing others to surrender their registration cards to them. Those who do not surrender the cards are promised hell. They do this under the directives of their party chairman. Some of them are civil servants, others tax defaulters. They deserve to be reprimanded seriously.

.....

Though supposedly written and signed by Hon. Tamfu, many of those whose names appeared in the letter knew he got the names from Hon. Tala Kwalar, otherwise Hon. Tamfu who lives in Nkambe couldn't have known their names and addresses', a local political analyst observed.

The Immediate Cause of the Genocide

The immediate cause of the genocide was an application by Jones Tansah Ndzi, Ndu SDF District Chairman to hold a rally on 6 June 1992. The avowed objective of the rally was to educate his militants on the First Party's national convention which was held in Bamenda that year. The Nkambe administration was not comfortable with the idea of a rally which was clearly a forum to castigate the regime in place. It, however,

reluctantly issued authorization at 5 pm. On 5 June 1992, a day before the projected rally, another letter came from the Nkambe cancelling the authorization and was signed by the D.O. who had issued the earlier authorization. Given that the letter was received at the eleventh hour, it was practically impossible for the chairman to alert his militants and sympathizers that the rally had been cancelled, especially as cell phones were then not yet in use in Cameroon.

6 JUNE 1992

At 9 am that morning, SDF militants and sympathizers thronged the party's secretariat for the rally only to be told that the authorization had been withdrawn. At that moment, Hon. Kwalar passed in a taxi at breakneck speed, heading for Nkambe. After a few minutes, the honourable man's confidant called round at the secretariat with the message that Honorable Kwalar had gone to Nkambe to bring in the gendarmes for a tax drive. The setting-up of a TV set to show a video about the First SDF National Convention in Bamenda was stopped on the instructions of the SDF cohorts (Mr Polycarp Talla and Mr I. Nkarawa) who came in from Bamenda.

At noon, two hours after Hon. Kwalar had left Ndu for Nkambe, a contingent of armed gendarmes and the DO Central Mr Tanyitiku Bayee Arikai arrived in Ndu Market. Meanwhile the Hon. Kwalar stayed in Nkambe to be beyond accusation. The DO who thought the unauthorized rally would be held in defiance of the letter of cancellation, was disappointed because it had hoped to use it as justification for a crackdown on 'the headstrong pro-opposition population of Ndu'. But the DO didn't need to wait for another opportunity. The gendarmes who accompanied him were an ingenious lot who on duty along the major highways of the various areas they worked always invented what is popularly known as *motif* in French to fleece money off nervous taxi drivers. They conceived the idea of a tax drive and immediately entered the overcrowded markets to implement it. Indiscriminate arrests (of school children and students) ensued and those caught were locked up in the Civil Registry Office. Relatives of the detainees swelled round the office, causing the escape of some of the detainees through a broken window. To disperse them, the gendarmes fired tear gas into the crowd. Warning shots followed. The angry mob responded with stones. This resulted in the wounding of the Nkambe company commander in the face. By 6 pm, the detainees had been thrown like rubbish into the truck that had brought in the gendarmes. To protect the truck and prevent the escape of their captives, the gendarmes fired warning shots into the air. The crowd responded by throwing stones. This resulted in the truck's windscreen being broken and, provoked, guns started 'coughing' and tear

gas rained down on the confused crowd. Ubiquitous groaning and wailing stole the hour. The first victim was Ta-Shey Yongla, a trader from Nso, who was shot in the abdomen. Some ten metres to his left, in front of a bistro, an octogenarian was chewing medicinal herbs and simultaneously holding his open belly tight as blood continued oozing out. That was Pa Anthony Tangiri of Talla Village in Ndu Subdivision who was selling taxes that day and castigating people for evading taxes. He couldn't have been easily shot but for the fact that instead of running for his dear life like others, he seemingly thought bullets had eyes and could distinguish between tax collectors and tax evaders. Some five metres away from the market and in front of her workshop lay Miss Ngeh Glory in her pool of blood with an open head. She was shot in the forehead as she was attempting to lock her door. Idrisu Konfor of Ndu and Mbidzinyuy Jonathan also from Nso were wounded by the bullet while Pastor Enock Shey was suffocated by tear gas. Pa Anthony Tangiri and Ta-Shey Yongla died early the next day on 7 June 1992. Miss Ngeh Glory died later on 10 June 1992 in the Banso Baptist Hospital.

Maddened by the killings, the crowd pelted the Travellers Lodge with stones, breaking over fifty windowpanes. The 'crime' of this hitherto innocent hotel had been that it was used earlier that day as a temporary base for operations by the DO and gendarmes. Operation Damage Gendarmes' Property also followed during which the homes of some five Ndu gendarmes were visited and their possessions reduced to ashes.

Firing by the Ndu gendarmes continued throughout the night, damaging windows and windscreens. The unluckiest victim was Munya (the former Ndu Tea Estate factory manager) whose three vehicles in Njipluh village in Ndu were destroyed. The only functioning petrol station, Total, was also destroyed by the marauding gendarmes. Two cars coming in from Bamenda and the South West Province respectively were shot at and later burnt. The shot car No. NW5522 A was carrying Hilary Njeta of Ngarum Village. He was shot in the back and the bullets remained in his stomach. The owner of the car, Ngala N (the proprietor of Conference Home Discotheque in Nkambe) narrowly escaped death. Some of the passengers took refuge in Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary Ndu. That night, Nso residents, Brain Bongkiyung and David Manjong were also wounded by bullets.

If the incoming vehicles were shot at that night, it was not unconnected with the fact that the gendarmes wanted to kill Tansah and Mr Emmanuel Nfor, who was believed to have taken Glory Ngeh and Pa Ta-Shey Yongla to hospital that night. The gendarmes thought they would be in one of the incoming vehicles from Nso.

Nothing of great importance was recorded on 7 June except for the wailing of people after Mr Njeta's corpse was discovered in a car near

the Total petrol station. Pa Anthony Tangiri's corpse was taken to Nkambe General Hospital for an autopsy. To intensify the fear and tension that reigned, a military helicopter which was rumoured to have been carrying Nkambe administrators manoeuvred over the town. Gunshots and nocturnal destructions persisted, carried out by the angry gendarmes of Ndu. Late Njeta Hilary's brother (Tonga Ferdinand) died early that day from shock.

On 8 June more gendarmes came in from Nkambe, Nso, Bamenda and Bafoussam as reinforcements as a result of the lies from CPDM perpetrators that in addition to destroying gendarme property, their wives and children were being molested and some gendarmes were even declared missing or dead. Some people were picked up and tortured. Among them were Ndu Tea Estate workers and some civil servants. The head of the Ndu Baptist Health Center and some foreigners (Nigerians and Ghanaians) were also interrogated and molested. Schooling was obstructed and GCE candidates were interrogated and tortured on their way to the examination centre (J.M.B.C. Ndu), which was, besieged by the gendarmes. Meanwhile, all the Ndu outlets were sealed by the armed gendarmes. There was a mass exodus by Ndu residents through the bushes that evening when the gendarmes went for their meal or to rest.

9 June 1992 (BLACK DAY)

By 5 am armed gendarmes had started breaking into houses and shops and looting property. Cases of rape were reported in Mbarcourt, Lowland and Njipluh. The wife of Pa Yembe, aged about seventy, was beaten and robbed of FCFA 250,000. People were ordered out of their houses at gunpoint and instructed to crawl on their knees for long distances to the Total petrol station. Here, they were stripped naked and their dresses with money and important documents like national identity cards were set on fire by the gendarmes close to the petrol station. The fact that petrol is inflammable meant nothing to them. A certain Pa Munya, aged over a hundred, and his daughter, a nurse who had just come in from Limbe, were also made to crawl. A woman who attempted to escape had her pubic hair burnt. But for the timely intervention of some Catholic sisters and an ex-soldier, the woman would have been burnt alive. From the Total junction, the naked captives were paraded to Honourable Talla Kwalar's school, Ndu Comprehensive High School.

The N.C.H.S Drama

One of the social responsibilities of a journalist is to suppress information that s/he thinks could be offensive or injurious to public morality or public decency. This is why victims of rape are never exposed without their consent. But when acts of torture or sexual violence are perpetrated

by the state, in public, it would be an unpardonable act of disservice to society if the writer should cover them up.

Besides, that power of truth which obliges Sybil Elton in Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan*, even in her dying moments to recount the horrors of hell, prevents me from withholding the flow of ink here. Therefore, Pen, write on.

Both men and woman were forced into the upper-sixth classroom where the women were made to sit down and open wide their legs to the men who in like manner sat opposite them, and forced them to look deep into the women's vaginas, but warned against any erection. '*Man wey yi mblacot stand, go receive one cane for-am*' they warned in Pidgin English. Those who were not so beautiful or who were on the black list submitted by the CPDM top brass were subjected to wanton torture. Menstruating women were forced to rub their menstrual blood on their faces, while beer bottles, gun barrels and ground pepper were pushed into their vaginas. But hold your breath. A pregnant warder's wife, Yaya Florence, who could not open wide her legs was kicked with boots and slapped with gun butts on her back, which led to the miscarriage of her twins (a boy and a girl).

Get this again. Just as the tortured detainees, who were by then almost immune to the various tortures, were singing on the orders of their tormentors, they were ordered to have sex. This was supposed to take place between a man and woman who were facing each other. Fortunately, the Secretary of State for Public Works and Transport Shey Jones Yembe and the National Chairman of the Human Rights Commission Solomon Nfor Gweil arrived at this moment. Had this not happened, fathers could have had sex with their daughters, mothers with their sons and brothers with their sisters.

George Tala, a worker in CBTS Ndu, received the worst beatings. He was beaten with a rubber truncheon, gun butts and hit on the back with a small axe which caused him to fall on his face on the dirty NCHS floor. Breathless and exhausted, he asked three times to be given water and to have some poured on his body to relieve him of his excruciating pains and three times the sadistic gendarmes torturing them ignored him. He was, however, later relieved by some 'Good Samaritan' gendarmes who almost developed neurasthenia from the sadistic acts of their colleagues. They carried him to the tap and soaked him with water. On 4 February 1994, Mr Tala died from the protracted illness he contracted that year.

By noon on that 'Black Day', all the NCHS detainees were released and some gendarmes disarmed by the intervention of the two influential Wimbun elites, the Secretary in State for Public Works and Transport, Mr Shey Jones and the Chairman of the Human Rights

Commission, Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei. By evening, they came out again clearing crops, breaking into houses and smashing windows. Television sets and other electronic equipment were brought out and smashed on doorsteps. Wardrobes, cupboards, beds and clothes were brought out and set ablaze. Books, documents, certificates and copies of theses, such as that of Doctor Njila I. K. were treated in like manner. The elderly Pa Muna was forced to eat a square metre of Bahamas grass near his goats. This same day, some women delivered their babies in the bushes where they were hiding and had to cut their babies' umbilical cords with blades of elephant grass stalk.

Meanwhile, news about Njeta's brother, Tonya Ferdinand, who dropped dead on his way to Ngarum to be present at his brother's burial, also reached Ndu Town. On 12 June, most of the murderous and thieving gendarmes were seen wearing jeans and other clothes looted from the shop of Collins Kwalar. A mad spinster was beaten with such brutality that she died three weeks later. Destruction, looting and torture shifted to Ndu Tea Estate where cutlasses, guns, axes and cultural items were confiscated.

Also at Ndu, the gendarmes introduced a form of hunting, with domestic animals as the targets. Goats were gunned down by the gendarmes, not for the love of their meat but to satisfy the sadistic pleasure of seeing living things die. Television sets, beds and cupboards were destroyed or carted away because the gendarmes thought Ndu too small a town for its inhabitants to enjoy such luxury. And as if to mock the whole idea of human rights protection, the gendarmes stormed Ntumbaw, the home village of Solomon Nfor Gwei, the chairman of the government-created National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) and looted and destroyed property.

The gendarmes were planning to invade three other villages: Ntundip, Luh and Taku on 12 June when they were called back to their barracks. Some of the Ndu inhabitants who were hiding in bushes only returned home after confirmation that the gendarmes had indeed left town. The gendarmes had confirmed Jonathan Swift's definition of the word soldier as 'one trained to kill as many of his kind who had never offended him as possible'.

Victims Speak

Nothing acts as fast in relieving stress as the 'Talking Cure', Sigmund Freud's contribution to modern nursing. Many of those who survived the Ndu Genocide would perhaps not still be alive today if they had not recounted what happened to them. For the sake of brevity and to pacify real or pretentious advocates of gender equality, I have decided to recount only the testimonies of four victims: two men and two women.

Madam Kingbir Awa told all those who cared to listen that she went out to relieve herself at 5 am on 9 June when some gendarmes spotted her. She was ordered to crawl to the main road where the gendarmes instructed her at gunpoint to remove her knickers. A beer bottle was forced into her vagina after which she was ordered to crawl to the Total station, one of the torture centres, with the bottle still in her. Once there, she was forced to strip and throw her clothes into the raging fire. 'At this time I started bleeding. Blood also oozed from the wounds on my knees,' she recalled. After that, she and fellow victims were ordered to jump into the truck the gendarmes had brought. Those who could not jump were beaten with rubber truncheons. The captives were taken to join their colleagues at Ndu Comprehensive High School where the torture continued. On her release following the arrival of Nfor and Shey Jones Yembe, she was taken by her husband to hospital in Ako District of Donga-Mantung and later to Baisa hospital in Nigeria.

Irene Njeshu Njitung, another victim, was arrested at Nkambe and detained for over two months on cooked-up charges by Ndu CPDM lackeys that she convened a meeting of fellow SDF activists at her DALLAS bistro and smoked marijuana with them. This, the accusation went, was to give them the necessary courage to destroy the property of CPDM adherents. Her detention was perceived by many as a means of punishing her father for daring to allow the Ndu SDF district use a room in one of his four-storey buildings as their secretariat. While in detention she was used as a night-soil woman, carrying away the faeces of other detainees.

Pa Augustine Ndi was the person who ate Bahamas grass like the Biblical King Nebuchadnezzar. But the only difference here was that he did so at gunpoint, and as he and four other youth were chewing grass, some of the gendarmes urinated on them, while others beat them on their backs using rubber truncheons. Since that day, he complains, he has had a stomach ulcer.

Samuel Tanyi Ojong, a government school teacher working in Ndu was ordered to strip in front of his pupils and his clothes were thrown into the fire after he had also been forced to crawl to the same Total garage. The gendarmes who humiliated him had no other excuse than the fact that teachers beat them while they were in primary school. This to them was a chance for vengeance.

Children were not spared either. Mildred Ndi, the daughter of Michael Ndi, then a class one pupil in Catholic School Ndu, was brutalized when gendarmes invaded their home. The writer recounts that when the child saw them, she became frightened and crept into her neighbour's house that had been ransacked earlier in the day. When the gendarmes went into that house they realized some of their colleagues

had been there before them and had carried away most of the valuable things there. The gendarmes thought of nothing better to do than to shatter window panes and break the furniture. Pieces of glass fell on the frightened and confused child and wounded her. The gendarmes were not satisfied with the pain already inflicted on her and one of them kicked her with his boots and she sustained more injuries. Her father believes her survival was a miracle.

As compensation for an assignment well carried out, Peter Oben Ashu and Tanyitiku Bayee Arikai, Donga Mantung SDO and Nkambe DO were promoted, the former became governor of the Southwest Province. The latter was first made the secretary general in the Northwest governor's office and later, governor of the East Province. They both hail from Manyu Division in the Southwest Province and are now retired. Ndu has remained permanently attached to the SDF, despite the fact that Emmanuel Ngafeeson, a native of the area, was appointed member of government at the beginning of the 21st century and has been campaigning and begging Ndu people to forgive the CPDM regime and embrace the ruling party.



Electors and Cheaters

1992. It will take Cameroonians several decades to forget this year, if at all. Here I mean Cameroonians who could distinguish between right and wrong in that year. It was the year of SDF glory as well as shame. It was the year of glory because the Fru Ndi, from available statistics, won the presidential elections in October, but a year of shame because the party failed to participate in the 1 March legislative polls. Concerning the parliamentary polls, the party erroneously thought government would postpone elections after the SDF declared the existing electoral laws too bad to allow for free and fair elections. ‘No good laws, no elections’ was the SDF’s position.

This decision was opposed by well-meaning political observers who did not regard boycotting as a sound political weapon. But Fru Ndi had the overwhelming support of the militants. The Church also bought the idea, with eminent evangelists like revivalist Micheal Bame Bame, a teacher at the Protestant University of Theology in Yaoundé, echoing it. Bame Bame argued that change could not be effected from within, citing the cases of Nelson Mandela and Jesus Christ who succeeded by operating outside the system. Consequently, the SDF decreed ‘Ghost Towns’ on election day, which were respected by the majority of its militants and sympathizers. The UNDP, the UPC and some minor parties decided to go in. Fru Ndi’s party had a good chance of sweeping the polls because the CPDM rigging machine was then not yet perfected to the level it is at today.

Biya himself was yet to recover from the embarrassment caused him by the Messi Messi Affair, in which Robert Messi Messi, the previous manager of the formerly well-stocked SCB Bank had blamed the collapse of this famous financial institution on the loans taken out by Biya’s wife, Jeanne Irene Biya and her sisters, and which had not been paid back.

Proof of how weak the CPDM was can be seen in the fact that the opposition parties that took part obtained 92 of the 180 seats, while the ruling CPDM got only 88 seats. The SDF was plunged into deep regret and mourning, especially as the CPDM won all 20 seats in the Northwest, its fief. The UNDP won 68 seats, the UPC got 18 and the

MDR, a relatively obscure party, had 6. Biya acted promptly by not only persuading the MDR to join the CPDM. He demonstrated political pragmatism and magnanimity by appointing Achidi Achu, one of the just-elected Northwest MPs, as prime minister. The SDF was thus condemned to succumb to the painful reality that those who boycott an election end up being ruled by people they did not choose.

Fru Ndi and his supporters have since employed all the wit and sophisms they are masters of to justify the boycott decision. One of the arguments put forward by their spin doctors was that government relaxed its fraud mechanism only because of the SDF boycott. But whatever excuse they proffered, few sympathized with them. For instance, they argued that the Biya regime relaxed its fraud mechanism only because the SDF had boycotted the elections.

The 1992 legislative election was important in that it helped to bring into the limelight an individual who was to play a significant part in Cameroon politics for 15 years. Doh Gah Gwanyin III, Fon of Balikumbat, embraced the SDF from its inception and was optimistic that he could get into Parliament on the SDF platform. He was certainly not one of those to whom the SDF's boycott decision made sense and he registered protest by joining the very ruling party which he had embraced the opposition to oust from power. He certainly believed, like Nkwame Nkrumah, that the political kingdom should be sought first and everything else would follow. He was not a candidate in the 1992 parliamentary election but reasoned impressively that if he did something dramatic to embarrass the opposition, the ruling party would take serious note of him. His calculations proved correct.

Fon Doh, who had vowed that the CPDM must win in Balikumbat by any means, tried to force stuffed ballot papers on the counting commission. This led to a clash with militants of the UNDP, the only other party contesting the elections in Balikumbat, although UNDP militants were determined that this should not happen. In the confrontation that followed, Fon Doh opened fire on the crowd seriously wounding one Henry Doba. The crowd which mistook him (Doba) for dead decided that a chieftaincy title provided no immunity for a murderer and started raining blows on Fon Doh after overpowering and disarming him. He would have been lynched but for the ingenuity of a traditional doctor who, true to his calling, deemed it necessary to prevent death at any time be it by macro organisms (human beings) or micro ones (germs and viruses). The doctor was close to Fon Doh and advised him to fall and feign death. The doctor then raised an alarm saying the Fon was dead. He warned the Balikumbat population of impending ancestral wrath for regicide.

On hearing this announcement, anger suddenly gave way to

panic and most of those who had taken part in the beating asked: 'Have I ever eaten anything without giving you a share?' The response was in the negative as evident from the speed with which many of the UNDP activists quit the battleground. Meanwhile, Fon Doh had instantly heeded the doctor's voice and acted his part very well by pretending to be unconscious. Just as when a cat, which had as hidden agenda the imminent captive of a rat, closes its eyes pretending to be asleep while keenly watching his prey running around him, Fon Doh while lying on the ground, watched through half-closed eyes those who had been hitting him now scamper away to safety.

When the crowd had dispersed, leaving only Fon Doh, the doctor and a few of his supporters, he was taken to Balikumbat Health Centre for treatment. He later sought refuge at the palace of neighbouring Bafanji, and from there he found his way to Bamenda where he has a home. His first move on arriving Bamenda town was not to pray to God to forgive his enemies (for they knew not what they had done). Instead, he acted in compliance with the laws of King Hammurabi of Mesopotamia who recommended revenge as the best course of action for anyone suffering an injury. Fon Doh followed this prescription, not by going back himself to pounce on his adversaries but by forwarding to the Northwest gendarmerie a list of those he suspected had not only beaten him but had also attempted to burn down his palace.

Bees sting but this is nothing compared to the pain inflicted by gendarmes, uninformed men trained to kill as many unarmed fellow men who have never offended him as possible. The gendarmes according to the victims who later briefed me at their concentration camps entered Balikumbat Village at dawn. While some positioned themselves at road junctions to torture those going to their farms or for other businesses, others invaded homes, beating their occupants and arresting suspects. As many as 84 people were arrested. Many were to spend over six months in detention and only to be released thanks, to the intervention of human right groups.

The importance of the Balikumbat episode is that it endeared Fon Doh to the ruling party and paved the way for many more macabre events that were later to place Cameroon on the same high pedestal as some of the world's greatest violators of citizens' rights.

After the realization that the CPDM could be beaten, the SDF determined to partake in future elections regardless of how bad the laws were. The party's critics, in fact, reminded Fru Ndi and collaborators more often than they were ready to hear that the party had missed a golden opportunity to effect change through the ballot box.

That these critics were right is evident from the fact that Fru Ndi took part in the 11 October elections that year and from many pointers,

won, but his victory was 'stolen'. The results were preceded by campaigns, the likes of which had never been seen in Cameroon. Eight opposition candidates took part. Fru Ndi campaigned on the platform of the Union of Change with Hameni Bieueu, chairman of the UFDF. An attempt to seek a single platform for the opposition had failed, with prominent opposition leaders like Bouba Bello Maigari and Adamou Ndam Njoya, chairman of the UNDP and CDU (Cameroon Democratic Union) unwilling to accept Fru Ndi's argument that politics was a game of numbers and that with the SDF having the largest following, its candidate should be the only one. They felt that by dint of being more qualified academically and in terms of work experience, they should lead. Bello Bouba was a former prime minister and Ndam Njoya was a former minister of national education. Both considered themselves the right person in terms of experience, to lead the country.

The hottest part of the campaign was an unprecedented rally in terms of numbers that was held in Amadou Ahidjo Stadium in Yaoundé where a soldier, armed with a pistol to presumably assassinate Fru Ndi, was caught by the crowd and beaten to death. This incident brought the rally to an abrupt end and is said to have provoked top members of the ruling Beti clan from which the presumed assassin hailed. The top Beti military officers are said to have immediately taken up positions at Unity Palace, vowing that Fru Ndi would have to shoot his way in even if he won the elections by 99.99%. The elections took place the next day without any major problems although there were complaints of fraud, as is always the case in Cameroon elections. The returns sheet, especially in the Northwest, Southwest, Littoral and West provinces (the Grand Ouest), showed that Fru Ndi was overwhelmingly in the lead.

While the counting commission was counting, prospects of a Fru Ndi victory were very high, especially after the Americans declared what they were convinced that was the true result. The Americans had given Fru Ndi 43% of the vote. The general understanding was that the Americans had tapped telephone lines. Newspapers had reported a conversation between Biya and Andre Tsoungui, the minister of territorial administration in which Tsoungui had conferred that Fru Ndi was winning. *'Je ne veux rien entendre. Je veux gagner les elections'* ('I don't want to hear anything. I want to win the elections'). Andre Tsoungui who did not know that telephone lines had been tapped was briefing Biya on the state of things having received the results from the ten provincial governors who had in turn got them from the SDOs.

In fact, the US Embassy incurred Biya's wrath by publishing and pasting on their notice board figures which showed that Fru Ndi and not Biya had won the election. According to the embassy, Fru Ndi obtained 43%, while Biya came second with 39% of the votes. The diplomatic row

that followed almost ruptured relations with the US government. Augustin Kontchou Kouomegni, then government spokesman and minister of communication pointed accusing fingers at the CIA and boasted that Cameroon had nothing to learn from the West. Konchou acknowledged the US position as the world's greatest superpower but said a goat even before it is eaten by a lion has the right to cry out. The publication of the results was the furthest the US could go to show its commitment to democratic elections. It was left for those Cameroonians who were convinced that their candidate had won to take to the streets to defend their victory. But they erroneously thought the US would feel hurt and send in the Marines to invade Cameroon, remove Biya and put Fru Ndi in Etoudi. Fru Ndi seemed to have the same opinion. The late Albert Mukong, a renowned human rights crusader, told me with profound disappointment 'This country has been given to Fru Ndi on a plate of gold but he has refused to take it/' Mukong spoke after Fru Ndi failed to buy the idea of being installed in Douala as head of state, with severe consequences sure to follow. The radicals tried to give their idea substance and justification by claiming that five of the country's then 15 generals were prepared to back the SDF.

Events leading up to the proclamation of 11 October 1992 elections constituted some of the most dramatic in the country's political history. Prior to it, the Minister of Territorial Administration (MINAT) had started dishing out what it claimed were result trends, which showed Biya in the lead and Fru Ndi close behind. The idea was that by the time Biya was pronounced winner, the news would come as no surprise. So traumatizing were these announcements that a Takumbeng woman who was listening to them lost self control when the gap between Biya's figures and Fru Ndi's was announced that a pan of *achu*, a popular dish in the Northwest, fell off her head. Having sufficiently shocked the public, CRTV announced later that what it had been giving as result trends were figures from previous elections. But even after that, the official pronouncements gave the public sufficient reason to suspect that a lot of manipulation was going on. For instance, it frequently told Cameroonians that whoever emerged as the winner in the end would be a Cameroonian and should be accepted. To put an end to the manoeuvring, the Union for Change thought the best step to take was to organize a press conference and announce what the true verdict of the 11 October presidential election was. The press conference was held at Ntamulung Church Centre in Bamenda where Fru Ndi was proclaimed winner. This pronouncement was described as 'extremely dangerous' but produced the right effect. The manoeuvring stopped and the regime proclaimed the verdict it had since prepared, to announce when it would be sure that the news would not result in conflagration.



Sacrificial Lambs and Wolves

The long-awaited verdict came at 11 am on 23 October 1992. Our school was on break and I took advantage of this to go downtown and follow the Supreme Court's pronouncement on a TV set in one of the popular drinking spots along Bamenda's main market. Commercial Avenue was practically deserted except for a few taxicabs. Most of the town's inhabitants were at home following events on TV or in the bars like myself.

The Supreme Court president, Alexis Dipanda, started by quoting the relevant texts empowering his institution to declare the results and proceeded to give details of the irregularities that characterized the election exercise. Despite the fact that CRTV had prepared the minds of the public for Biya's victory, opposition leaders and their supporters expected either a pronouncement that the results had been cancelled or that somebody apart from Biya had won. When the pronouncement finally came that Biya had won, it seemed to SDF supporters that the world had come to an end. I was in a perplexed mood by the time I left that drinking spot.

I arrived to find the whole school in total disarray. I was so dejected I didn't have the least inclination to teach. A few teachers who had like myself just returned from break, pretended that what had just happened concerned only politicians and should not affect their lessons.

They were sadly mistaken. The students had learnt of the Supreme Court's verdict and, being convinced that they had no future under the Biya regime, concluded that learning was no longer important. As they rose from their benches and started leaving, some of the teachers attempted to prevent them. It was like trying to stop a torrent with a finger. The students shoved the teachers aside and ran out of the classrooms. Some of them jumped out through the windows. The principal, Renchi Abraham, was equally helpless and had to close the school for the day. I left the school campus like many of my other colleagues and started trekking home using the back entrance to the school.

The first indication that trouble had begun was a scream from

one of the compounds close to the gate. On looking in the direction from which the noise had come, I saw a fire and a thick cloud of smoke that was polluting the atmosphere. I learnt from one of the onlookers that a mob of opposition supporters had dragged out the furniture of a Beti clansman who was a tenant in that house and set them on fire. They were, however, too humane to lynch them. The same concern for human life seemed to influence the mob that set on fire the house of Mrs Regina Mundi, a member of the ruling CPDM central committee.

Albert Cho Ngafor, a relation of Simon Achidi Achu, the then prime minister, was not so fortunate. Ngafor was the proprietor of NACHO College, the biggest institution in Anglophone Cameroon with a student enrolment of over five thousand students. Ngafor attracted the wrath of the mob by emerging from his office with a pistol, which was actually intended more for intimidation than for use. Unfortunately, Ngafor was yet to be fully acquainted with the notion that crime is always a step ahead of criminology and so was not prepared for what happened next. According to eyewitnesses, some of the students who had scores to settle with him had taken advantage of his preoccupation with the crowd and walked on tiptoe to a position where neither Ngafor nor anybody sympathetic to him could see them. From their vantage point, they leaped, grabbed his waist and wrested the pistol from his hands. The next moment, Ngafor was sprawled on the ground and, being a giant of a man with a huge stomach, cut a truly comic figure. They practically did high jump using his belly, which served both as takeoff and landing point. One of the students who begrudged him for defrauding him of a reasonable amount of money with the pretext that it was for school fees behaved as if Ngafor had swallowed the money instead of spending it. 'That money must come out,' the aggrieved student shouted as he trampled on the defeated college proprietor. Ngafor's life was spared only because the majority of those present argued that as he had killed nobody, he didn't deserve the supreme punishment.

His school was not entirely burnt down because it was solidly built but a great deal of damage was done both in terms of infrastructure and among the student population. NACHO College is today the counterfeit of its former self and that is why it was said at the proprietor's funeral 14 years later that 'he was killed in 1992 and buried in 2006'. Before his death, Ngafor had been chosen and later deposed as the president of the Association of Northwest 1992 Election Victims.

Ngafor and his family were not the only sufferers. When the perpetrators of the arson came to burn down his house in Ade Meter quarter, they found it occupied by Paul Michelson, an American citizen. From what I learnt later, they told him that he was lucky to be a citizen of the US, a friendly country, and that if he had been French, he would have

regretted the day he was born. They packed his things, looked for different lodgings for him and after buying him a cold beer, came back and set fire to Ngafor's house. Another victim of arson the same day was Joseph Ncho Adu, a CPDM Central Committee member. His Hotel Resort 84 was burnt down.

Senseless Vendetta

The greatest casualty that day was Alhadji Tita Fomukong, the leader of the Cameroon National Party (CNP). Tita Fomukong had incurred the wrath of the population by first joining the 'Presidential Majority', a group of parties supporting President Biya's CPDM.

On that day, he and his wife made a worse error than Ngafor by not only arming themselves with pistols but by actually firing them to scare the crowd. Fru Ndi's supporters took the wrong information to Ntarinkon that Tita Fomukong had shot and killed three persons. Relying on this information, Fru Ndi would have demonstrated a lack of sympathy for militants he was convinced had died opposing the Biya regime. Fru Ndi allowed them to mete whatever sanctions the deemed fit to punish the politician, That same day Tita Fomukong was burnt to death and a toy lion, which the mob had brought along, was placed on his charred remains. This was intended to convey the message that he was a lion but had been overcome by stronger forces. I didn't eat roasted meat for several weeks after seeing and inhaling the stench from the remains of the assassinated politician.

It is necessary to note here that his title 'Alhadji' was not followed by a Muslim name as is often the case, but by his surname. Those who associated the title Alhadji (not El Hadj) with negativism (fey mania, banditry etc) saw Tita Fomukong in that light. Some even thought he was 'Grand Tita', a notorious gang leader who some years back had terrorized the Kumba population. A supporter of Biya, he formed his party with no other intention than to spy on and help to destroy the SDF. His closeness to Fru Ndi (his home was just about two km from Fru Ndi's residence) helped to support his opponents' argument that he chose to live in Ntarinkon in order to spy on their Chairman.

So strong was the contempt Fru Ndi's supporters had for the politician, that his wife was subjected to the most sublime humiliation after his death. A day after her husband's death, SDF fanatics, without the slightest inkling of sympathy for a woman whose husband had been burnt in front of her eyes, dragged her from where she had taken refuge and stripped her. They then placed her in a wheelbarrow with each of her legs tied to the instrument and paraded her along Bamenda Commercial Avenue, her private parts open to public view. Her tormentors argued that she had not accompanied other older women who marched naked in

protest against the killing of their children by Biya regime. She thought she could escape. It was now her turn to march in Eve's attire.

The burnings which began on 23 October continued the next day and for the rest of the week. What puzzled many was that security men were present when some of the burnings took place but they failed to intervene. When Tita Fomukong's house was under attack, a security helicopter arrived, circled over his house and turned back. The crowd expected a contingent of policemen or gendarmes to storm the place and rescue him but nothing of the sort happened. I was particularly embarrassed when a mob came to burn the palace of the Fon of Mankon, the traditional landlord of Mankon and first vice national chairman of the ruling CPDM party. To attract many witnesses, they played drums and danced to the tune of *Mbaglum*, a popular local dance. A gigantic gendarme officer, holding an AK 47 stood close by but made no effort to deter the arsonists. On the contrary, he said he had never taken a beer from Fon Angwafor even though the CPDM gave him money. He therefore had no obligation to protect the palace.

One of the victims whose case attracted much sympathy, even from some opposition supporters, was George Ndikum, popularly called 'George Town' because this name was written on his taxi cabs. Not only was his house burnt down, the perpetrators of the violence pursued the various taxi cabs he owned and set fire to them one after the other. When I visited his residence afterwards, I saw his old mother lying on the ash-covered floor because her bed had been burnt. Other victims in Bamenda included A.K Ndikum, a staunch CPDM stalwart and PM Achidi Achu whose house and that of his sister were also set on fire. While the CPDM government blamed the SDF and its leadership, the SDF for its part accused the CPDM of orchestrating the violence to justify the punishment the government meted out on the Northwest, and particularly Bamenda, for supporting Fru Ndi. The SDF chairman provoked the ire of the victims of the arson by saying they burnt their property so that the government could offer them compensation. In a bid to discredit the SDF, top government officials brought the famous Desmond Tutu to Bamenda to see for himself how barbaric the opposition was being. To their embarrassment, the Anglican archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner said there was nothing unusual in what had happened. 'I am used to this kind of thing,' Desmond Tutu told them.

The victims refused to split hairs over who had or who had not done what. All they were interested in was compensation. Their argument was that the government had compensated victims of destruction by elephants in the North of the country. The regime had also compensated victims of a fire in Nsam on the outskirts of Yaoundé. The fire had been caused by fuel from a leaking petrol tanker. The fire had burnt some

victims to death and others who were attempting to carry away the fuel for their own use or for sale. The victims reasoned that there were thieves who wanted to lose fuel in the same manner as their well-placed compatriots who controlled the nation's patrimony. Compensating them therefore was tacit approval of official theft which a country professing to fight corruption should punish rather than compensate.

On the contrary, the Northwest 1992 election victims were patriots exercising their civic rights by voting for the party of their choice. 'We didn't organize the elections. The government that did so has a moral duty to compensate us,' they argued.

Surprisingly, the argument of the victims which generated sympathy from many quarters including moderate opposition supporters, met with stiff opposition not from the state but from other victims. Francis Nkwain, a member of the government and one of those who also lost property, likened the victims to armed robbers who wanted to twist the arms of the state or extort money from the government. Nkwain who was Minister Delegate at the Ministry of External Relations, was angered by the fact that the victims did not stop with complaining but went on to sue the government at the African Commission for Human and People's Rights, commonly referred to as the African Court with headquarters in Banjul, the Gambia. Other apologists for the Biya regime argued that in any war, there must be casualties. The 1992 victims were the casualties of the war between the government and the opposition SDF.

Public opinion in the Northwest was, however, overwhelmingly in support of those who carried out the arson, so profound was the anger of the people of that province over what they and Fru Ndi termed the 'theft' of their electoral victory.

Interestingly, while the arson in the Northwest was going on, there were acts of violence in Ayos in the South Province from which President Biya hailed. The belligerents were Betis on the one side and Anglophones and Bamilikés, a pro-opposition clan that form the bulk of the West Province of Cameroon. The Betis were angry that these two groups wanted to 'remove *garré*' from the mouth of Paul Biya, their kinsman. 'Removing *garré*' is a common phrase for depriving somebody of his or her means of livelihood. The Betis in the town of Ayos, according to press and Ntarinkon sources, had attacked Anglophones and Betis first with invectives and later with clubs and machetes, ordering them to leave and go back to their provinces of origin.

It may not be out of place to comment here that while the burnings were going on in the Northwest Province, nothing of the sort happened in the West Province dominated by the Bamouns and Bamilike tribes, both opposition supporters. The tranquillity in Bamoun was understandable. Dr Adamu Ndam Njoya, a former minister of national

education who nursed presidential ambitions, felt more entitled to it by dint of being academically superior to Fru Ndi.

Fru Ndi, on the other hand, believed strongly that politics was a game of numbers. Besides being more charismatic, Fru Ndi was bolstered by fellow Anglophones in the party who were determined not to see him give up his lofty presidential ambition in favour of a Francophone. Anglophone SDF supporters argued that Francophones had ruled the country for an uninterrupted period of 32 years. Fru Ndi's refusal to capitulate before Ndam Njoya was the main reason why the Noun was indifferent to the 'theft' of Fru Ndi's victory.

The Bamilikes, for their part, felt that they had given the SDF enough financial support and that this was as far as they could go. The Bamilike who had lost more than 500,000 people during the UPC war with the Ahidjo-backed regime thought political martyrdom was not reserved for them. They had sought refuge in the Northwest when they were being pursued and mown down by French machine guns in the Forest of Kekem and other hideouts. They had joined Fru Ndi in their tens of thousands in the streets of Bafoussam and Bamboutous, their chiefs' towns.

Added to these were CPDM fishers in troubled waters who preached a Cameroonian version of Ku Klux Klan literature. They portrayed Northwesterners as tricksters out to deceive the Bamilikes and get them slaughtered as in the days of yore. They eventually set up a Mill Collines type of broadcasting house in Mbacham, one of their towns, mainly for anti-Northwest propaganda. Radio Mill Collines was the medium set up by extremist Hutus in Rwanda and used for hate propaganda against the minority Tutsi. The Rwanda Genocide of 1994 was a direct consequence of this hate literature.

The very fact that both SDF and CPDM supporters tried to play Pontius Pilate testifies to the enormity of the crime. It is noteworthy that although most of those who did the burning were known, their identities remained a guarded secret. And they would have remained so were it not for Fru Ndi himself who made an unguarded statement when the victims threatened to march in protest along the streets of Bamenda: 'This time we will burn people, not property.' The 1992 post-election victims told me soon after the SDF chairman made the declaration that they had taken serious note of it. The fact that nothing was done to Fru Ndi was proof of the government's complicity. If the Chairman were a drinker, said a victim who preferred not to be quoted, we would have thought he was acting under the influence of alcohol.

Haven of Freedom or Lion's Den?

I mentioned Fru Ndi's compound at the beginning of this narrative as if it

were Capitol Hill, Number 10 Downing Street, Buckingham Palace or some other world-renowned residence. It is a large fenced compound with a huge gate about five metres both in height and breadth. There is a small entrance for those on foot and a larger one is for cars. Close to the small entrance is a small room for the vanguard who act as sentinels. Quite often, there is a sour-faced woman who performs the function assigned to Cerberus, the three-headed dog that sits at the gate of hell in Greek mythology. She barks mostly at persons who come on foot showing signs of not being an insider. Her greatest enemies are journalists in the private press. She reads no newspapers and therefore never knows what has been written about the chairman. Her opinion is determined by the expression on Fru Ndi's face. If Fru Ndi speaks well of a particular journalist, she would also have a positive opinion of him/her. Each time the SDF chairman complains about a particular person or news organ, this modern-day Cerberus feels bound to be infuriated with that person or news organ too.

The compound is spacious and has three buildings. Fru Ndi's residence is on the right as you enter. It is a gigantic structure, well furnished with two sets of upholstered chairs, one for VIPs and another for commoners with a huge 30-inch television in the reception room. The dining room is not as spacious and can seat at most thirty people. On the left is a conference hall. Also spacious. It is here that most National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings are held. The NEC is the decision-making organ of the party. Many of Fru Ndi's critics believe that the hall was constructed so that all NEC meetings could be held there. This, they say, is a strategy to intimidate insubordinate militants. After any such meeting, it is common to see journalists waiting in the courtyard for the communication officer. After keeping journalists waiting for as long as she knows they can be, she comes out of the hall magisterially and pretends to be sorry for the delay and asks: 'Gentlemen what can I do for you?' After receiving the answer she knew even before asking the question, the all-knowing officer proceeds to brief them or rather pretend that she is briefing them.

The journalists finally return home with everything except the news since the conflicts, insults and other forms of exchanges are quietly shelved by the person giving the briefing. Needless to say, the press is kept out of all proceedings. If journalists really want the truth, the informants can only be disgruntled NEC members whose identities the journalists must conceal to avoid the dreaded Article 8.2. This is a section of the party's constitution that recommends the expulsion of anybody guilty of anti-party activities. Such activities from revealing party secrets to the press to flouting party instructions threatening to challenge Fru Ndi at elections may not immediately attract 8.2 but would lead to so

many aspersions being cast on the individual that if s/he dies and goes to hell, it means he or she has been to hell twice.

At the time the state of emergency was declared, the two other structures – the one-storey building and the conference hall – had not yet been constructed. The one-storey building which faces visitors as they enter, has a library and houses the party archives. Party critics believe these two buildings constitute the true headquarters of the party. Margaret Nyah, a former loyalist of Fru Ndi, believes that the SDF chairman has no intention of ever relinquishing power judging by the decision to run the party from his premises. To her, the SDF has been converted into an NGO without its militants in their large majority having the slightest idea. If Fru Ndi has no intention of ever quitting the party's helm, then he has no moral authority to say Biya should leave power.

Whatever criticism may be crafted against Fru Ndi's residence, one thing is certain, the ample space it contains allows it to play host to many. It was thanks to this that he was able to provide accommodation to 148 people during the state of emergency in 1992 which is our next point of focus.



Particulars of a State of Emergency

The announcement came when least expected. It was during the 7 o'clock news broadcast on 25 October that CRTV announced the declaration of a state of emergency in the Northwest Province. This state-owned station explained that the head of state had decreed that it would last for the three-month maximum period allowed. I had never known what a state of emergency was. Neither had the majority of Northwesterners.

The announcement also quoted the head of state saying he had taken the decision after consulting Prime Minister Simon Achidi Achu. This meant that the prime minister, who was a Northwesterner, would share most of the responsibility for whatever atrocities were committed during its duration. Talk about political scapegoats.

Since only a few persons knew what a state of emergency meant, the majority of the population did not know what to expect. Reality dawned at daybreak. Troops arrived in dozens of trucks and poured out onto every street corner in their thousands. They were heavily armed and looked fierce and menacing. Their immediate target was the residence of Fru Ndi, which was encircled by his supporters, thousands of people who were prepared to die for democracy or at least pretended they were ready to.

Just as on 26 May 1990, most defied the presence of the soldiers. They hadn't the faintest idea that they had come to place Fru Ndi under house arrest. They were alerted to this reality when the soldiers started firing, first into the air and then into Fru Ndi's compound. This caused the close to 2000 militants present to run for dear life, including those who had vowed to become martyrs of democracy. In the chaos that reigned, 150 of the militants sought refuge in Fru Ndi's compound. They thought their stay there would be brief and had no idea that the SDF chairman's residence would be their home for the next two months.

I watched the drama from a safe distance guided by the generally accepted principle in journalism that news gatherers should not be newsmakers. That it was better to stay alive and write a partial or not-so-accurate story than be killed and write no story at all. I reasoned that Dele

Giva would have written many stories if he had lived. By dying as he did, he left many stories unwritten. Dele Giva, the publisher of the Nigerian magazine *Newswatch* was killed by a letter bomb when he was in the process of releasing what is generally known in journalism as a scoop that would have implicated Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, then the Nigerian head of state, in a cocaine scandal. All attempts to dissuade Dele Giwa had failed. Besides I greatly cherished the maxim in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* that we sometimes stand in the compound of a coward and point to where a brave man once lived.

The attack on Fru Ndi's residence took place a few days after the arrival of the troops. The soldiers had taken their times so as to minimize casualties. By that time the town's residents had started to understand what a state of emergency was. The first proof that something was amiss was the strict dusk-to-dawn curfew. Night revellers who drank their beer and returned home late suddenly discovered that they no longer had that liberty. Many learnt the truth the hard way and ended up spending uncomfortable nights in police and gendarmerie cells. "True Cameroonians" knew what to do when arrested. They bribed the soldiers to let them return home and learnt to be back in their houses before nightfall. Prostitutes had a harder time, obliged by the nature of their work to sleep by day and work at night. A system in which they slept by night destabilized them. They had to change schedules but since their clients could only obtain the funds to pay sex bills by working during the day, most of the prostitutes quit Bamenda town for their villages to escape the misfortune of having to live as beggars.

Most of the soldiers, we were told by Ntarinkon sources which to many were akin to gospel preachers, had been sent to Bamenda on the merit of their seropositivity. This meant that the Biya regime wanted the Northwest population exterminated in a kind of genocide carried out by biological warfare. At that time the use of condoms was not much publicized and certainly not yet widespread. Even if sensitization had taken place, their use would have been generally impracticable given the crude sexuality of soldiers who argue that they are risk bearers and who think death through disease is as good or bad as death by the bullet. Because the soldiers demanded sex at gunpoint, women were helpless. I witnessed the case of a pretty girl returning home late from a drinking spot around Ntarinkon. She was just about to leave the main road and enter the quarter when one of the soldiers on night patrol ordered her to stop and have sex with him. The girl was stopped midway in her explanation by a gunshot fired into the air. What followed next is easy to guess. She preferred death by sexually transmitted disease to death by gunfire. Soldiers who needed women only gave instructions. They didn't need to woo. Quite often when they stopped a taxi, their interest was not

in the identity card of the passengers but whether there were pretty girls in it. Once one or more were identified, the soldiers let the taxi go and the girl or girls were taken away. Gang rape was common.

Not all soldiers satisfied their sexual desires by force. Many of them had girl friends who gave them food, provided water for washing and offered the 'sexual healing' they needed. In return, the soldiers gave them money and invited the girls to share drinks. In Nkwen Quarter where the bulk of the town's prostitutes live, soldiers were the principal customers since the civilian ones were in their homes at night for fear of arrest. Because the state of emergency had caused a slump in their business, prostitutes were reduced to the necessity of accepting FCFA 150 for sex.

The greatest victims of the state of emergency were known or suspected SDF supporters. The soldiers had a list of the names of these victims provided by vindictive victims of the arson that took place after the proclamation of the presidential election results. Most of these victims were in hiding and their accusers did not provide any proof of their accusation.

Anyone who had quarrelled or disagreed with any of the arson victims was considered guilty and their names included on the list. I remember the case of one of my late teacher friends, Nche Nico. Nche had a disagreement with some local CPDM barons who saw in the state of emergency a golden opportunity to settle scores. Nche had to go into hiding. One did not need to have taken part in the burning or be a suspect to be a target. Known SDF diehard supporters automatically qualified for the list.

The most shocking incident of gendarme brutality during the state of emergency was the killing of Che Ngwa Ghandi, an accountant in the Northwest Development Authority, MIDENO office. Ghandi, a handsome young man who still wore the Afro hair style fashionable in the 1970s hailed from Bafut, one of the largest clans in the Northwest about 10 km from Bamenda. Details of how Ghandi died were made public by Anthony Shallo a friend of Ghandi's who was also a colleague and circulated a handwritten 11-page document in which he stated that Ghandi had just audited the accounts of the NWCA (Northwest Cooperative Association), a parastatal which collected coffee from farmers, sold it and gave the money back to the farmers. This was when the coffee business was still lucrative.

According to Shallo, the audit report implicated a top government official who had been at the helm of the NWCA. The report indicated that hundreds of millions of FCFA had been embezzled. The accountant had proved uncooperative during negotiations with the highly placed suspect who wanted the report suppressed. Ghandi knew he was

going to pay dearly for his intransigence and, prior to his arrest, had told Shallo that he had a premonition that something tragic would happen to him. Ghandi, narrated his friend, was picked up from his office and taken to the dreaded BMM torture chambers situated at seat of the Northwest administration (Bamenda Upstation). He was accused as the one who championed the destruction of a house belonging to Margaret Achu, a relative of the top official during the post-election violence in the Northwest. Without giving the accountant an opportunity to defend himself, the men of blood suspended him on a torture machine popularly known by its French name *balancoir*. He was beaten on the head, face, legs, buttocks, soles of his feet, practically every part of his body.

All the screams of the young man, together with pleas that his life had spared, aroused no iota of sympathy in his tormentors. During the torture, other sources said, Margaret Achu came to the cell where this was going on and repeated the story that Ghandi championed the burning of her house. She claimed that he was the leader of the crowd that committed the arson and that as a signal for the operation to begin he cast the first stone on her roof. Ghandi is said to have pleaded with her that he was prepared to build another house for her if she intervened on his behalf and got him freed but the woman remained unrepentant.

When Ghandi's health situation degenerated and his toe nails were peeling off, his torturers seeing he would die in detention and being unwilling to accept this responsibility for such, dumped him at the Military Hospital Upstation, Bamenda. Despite the severe torture, Shallo continued about how his life could have still been saved and some of the military doctors were in the process of doing so when opposition came from an unexpected direction. An uncle of Ghandi's who objected in very strong terms to any move that could lead to Ghandi being treated or evacuated to another hospital where he could be properly attended to.

When Che Ngwa Ghandi finally died and his corpse was taken to the Bamenda Hospital mortuary, the uncle followed and insisted that the autopsy report should read that he died a natural death. Several million FCFA's are said to have been given to the doctors who carried out the post mortem and were on the verge of writing the true report. This was done because those who plotted Ghandi's death feared that his wife would later institute court action. She was in effect consulting human rights groups. In addition to the embezzlement at the NWCA, the plotters also wanted land at the T junction where Commercial Avenue, Bamenda's main street, starts. Ghandi had already begun erecting a building there. The plotters were so scared of possible legal action that they were prepared to spend any amount of money that they could afford to halt all her legal moves. Stories in town stated that Mrs Ghandi, a nurse by profession, had been invited to Yaoundé by Achidi Achu who used his

influence as prime minister to coerce her to become his lover. Later on, the PM is said to have arranged for her evacuation and that of her three children to the US at his own cost.

The killing of Ghandi had a hypodermic-syringe effect. News of the event shocked even the troops enforcing the state of emergency who were devastated by the information to the point that they relaxed their stranglehold on the town. The daily raiding of individuals' homes was temporarily suspended. Before this, it had been common for the inhabitants of a quarter in town to be awakened by bangs on their doors by soldiers who proceeded to ransack their homes. Items without a receipt were taken away if their owners failed to 'oil the lips' of the invading troops. People with no identification papers were ordered into military trucks which took them to the various concentration camps in town. Quite often, the police and gendarmes never even asked for these papers since their preoccupation was the pecuniary benefits they could derive from the exercise, which was what happened when they raided my one-room residence at Nsamukong Hall in Ntarinkon. They arrested me at gun point, ordered me to climb into a military truck and took me to the Public Security Constabulary at Old Town, Bamenda and there I was ordered to strip to my pants before being detained. When they later saw from my professional card that I was a newspaper reporter, they became even more furious. 'So you are one of those who want Biya to go so that Fru Ndi could take over,' a member of the ruling Beti clan said, visibly angry, 'you will rot here!' He didn't issue the threats in vain. But for the presence of a commissioner who knew me, I doubt if I would have come out of that place alive. I was spared the cane but had to receive all the venom and invectives the ruling Biya regime had in store for the private press.

'Before Biya goes many of you will be six feet under. *Vous allez voir*,' the enraged policemen said, pulling down his lower right eyelid to indicate his determination. Beti behaviour, which demonstrated the Biya regime's fear of the press, raised rather than lowered me in the esteem of fellow detainees and even the other policemen on duty. For the three days that I was detained, I was given VIP treatment. 'So you people are those shaking this government,' one of the policemen, an Anglophone, told me in a note of real admiration. Soon after the departure of the Beti bully, the commissioner told me to put on my pair of trousers. I was even allowed to leave the cell and sit in reception as long as I liked. All through my detention, the police made me understand that they were keeping me there because of instructions from above. On my release four days later they cautioned me to be more careful, which was another way of saying I should be less critical. But how could I be so when on a daily basis I saw the degradation of respectable people, well-dressed citizens ordered to lie

in muddy water or roll on the ground. I saw innocent people brutalized, hit with truncheons and sometimes with the barrel of the gun for the political sins of others.

The news of Che Ngwa Ghandi's death further radicalized not only me but most Northwesterners. We all knew Ghandi was not an SDF militant but had died a cruel death whereas those who carried out the burning were moving about in good health and sleeping under warm blankets with their lovers, while Ghandi's wife and children lived in sadness and hardship.

Although the state of emergency had as objective the subjugation of the Northwest Province for supporting the SDF, the focal point was Fru Ndi's compound. As stated earlier, troops fired into the air soon after arrival there as the only means of dislodging the mammoth crowd that surrounded the place and even kept vigil there to ensure he wasn't kidnapped. Although they succeeded in their mission of keeping Fru Ndi, Nyo Wakai (a retired judge), Boh Herbert (a journalist) and most of his diehard supporters, they still felt insecure and restive. Their greatest source of worry was the elderly women's cult Takumbeng. These women had proven that they were a formidable force when they performed rites against a gendarme who had assaulted one of them and the gendarme died the same day.

The tension at the Ntarinkon Palace was such that everyone lived in apprehension of a declaration of war by Fru Ndi. To prevent this, clergymen of all denominations and choir groups acting unmistakably through the influence of the Biya regime were easily admitted into the compound by the soldiers. Prayer sessions, choral singing and sermons were almost an hourly affair there. The whole idea was to soften Fru Ndi's mind so that he would contemplate violence or plunge the nation into civil war. Fru Ndi had given the regime a hint that he could employ military force on 23 October 1992, the day presidential election results were announced. As if to rub salt into an already painful wound, a military helicopter hovered over his house.

In reaction, Fru Ndi is said to have phoned and warned the governor of the Northwest Province that 'if that thing', meaning the helicopter, continued to fly over his roof, he would shoot it down. Of course he didn't have the weapons to do so but the threat gave the impression that he could. In less than a minute, the helicopter left Fru Ndi's compound. A subsequent search of Fru Ndi's compound was soon conducted and the SDF chairman was subjected to a nine-hour interrogation led by the late Ako Emmanue, a former Northwest delegate of internal security. As I learnt from one of the soldiers, they came with special instructions to ensure the SDF chairman was not physically harmed. But this did not extend to his family, which is why the soldiers

brutalized Fru Ndi's mother twice during the state of emergency for defending her son.

Besides allowing clergymen in, those bringing food to the hostages at Fru Ndi's compound had easy access. Ben Muna, then SDF campaign manager championed this exercise. Hospitality was by the soldiers themselves who had as much to eat and drink as the hostages and, within a short time, many grew fat. They soon became so humanized by the treatment they received that their hierarchy changed guard often. The regime had sufficient reasons to do so because of the alarming rate at which state secrets were being leaked to the enemy (SDF). In fact, every single move by the regime was soon known by SDF officials who passed them on to the papers. This was clear testimony that those sent to hold Fru Ndi had become militants and were then betraying those who dispatched them there. This was all the more so because most of the women in Bamenda were very 'generous' to the soldiers and easily got such secrets from them during love making. To please the women, some of the soldiers gave the impression that they had been instructed to dislodge the SDF chairman from his Ntarinkon residence and take him to Yaoundé where he would be drugged like Mbua Massock the initiator of the Ghost Town Operation. The purpose of administering this drug, the story went, was to damage the brain or transform Fru Ndi into a moron incapable of constructive thought and thus incapable of fighting Biya.

During the state of emergency, Fru Ndi was made to understand that if he conceded defeat, the Northwest would be liberated and he would be released from house arrest. But he SDF chairman stood his grounds, referring to himself as he did before house arrest that he remained Cameroonians' 'President Elect', hence the decision to evacuate him to Yaoundé.

So convinced were Fru Ndi's supporters of the story that they even determined the various means by which the evacuation was to take place. Some said he would be taken by road to Bamenda Airport which since its construction had served as an air force base. For this reason, SDF extremes suggested the destruction of the bridge over the river Mezam which Fru Ndi's captors had to pass to get to the airport. Others claimed he would be airlifted by helicopter and taken to Yaoundé. To pre-empt this, all of them vowed that they would grip the propellers of the helicopter which was bound to land before kidnapping Fru Ndi.

The superstitious group, which were in the majority, were convinced that Jean Fochive, then delegate general for internal security would come to Ntarinkon in the form of a dog. To ensure such a thing never happened, most dog owners kept their pets in their houses, while every stray dog especially those seen moving in the direction of Ntarinkon were stoned to death.

The moment this story got out, more than half of Bamenda's population defied the state of emergency that prohibited gatherings of more than three people and kept vigil at the Ntarinkon Palace. It was this defiance which gave Fru Ndi the courage he needed to announce after his six-week period of house arrest that he was going to attend the inauguration of President Bill Clinton. The press picked up the story and blew it out of all proportion. Newspapers gave the impression that Clinton had personally invited the SDF chairman. Fru Ndi on this occasion convinced me of his lies of omission by failing to tell the truth which was that it was actually an SDF lobby in the US that had arranged the SDF chairman's invitation.

To further cow the Biya regime, Fru Ndi and his aides also gave the public the impression that after the Washington trip, US marines would storm Unity Palace, evict Biya and install Fru Ndi as Cameroon's head of state. Though everything sounded fantastic, regime insiders could not dismiss the story altogether. They recalled the open clash with the Americans over the results of the presidential elections and the equally overt support given the anti-government student parliament (*parlements*) of the University of Yaoundé and decided that Americans were capable of anything.

At the beginning of the student riots, two student leaders nicknamed after Gulf War American heroes, General Swarzkopf and General Powell, sought refuge at the US Embassy when regime agents started hunting them.

During the course of the strike, gendarmes and policemen sent to intimidate and break them watched helplessly as US marines escorted them to the university campus where they announced the intensification of the strike and were taken back to the embassy. The storming of Panama, a sovereign state in Central America and the arrest, trial and imprisonment of its President Noriega was too recent to be forgotten or ignored. A gendarme confessed to me during the state of emergency that if he saw US marines streaming into Bamenda to rescue Fru Ndi, he would not wait to confront them. Another incident that helped to place the state of emergency in a very bad light was the death of Che Godfrey, approximately two months after its declaration.

The effect of the state of emergency in the Northwest was devastating. It entrenched in Northwesterners a degree of cynicism and radicalism hitherto unknown. As SDF militants were not known, they too suffered like the opposition. In fact, some soldiers who nursed opposition sentiments treated CPDM militants with uncommon brutality, thereby turning many of them into opponents of the Biya regime.

When it is considered that the state of emergency was declared in the heart of the dry season when nights are extremely cold, it would be

wrong to blame those who got involved in lasciviousness which reports say resulted in some pregnancies. If this in fact happened, the husbands of the victims were not vocal about it, perhaps for fear of being dubbed cuckolds. They might also have reasoned that in any war, there must be casualties and they happened to be among those of the state of emergency. It should however be said in fairness to Fru Ndi that, besides being unaware of this, there was nothing he could have done to avert the catastrophe. The soldiers who were in Bamenda also left behind offspring. The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Northwest is said to be the consequence of the state of emergency. Also, a young man named Che Godfrey, held under house arrest in Fru Ndi's compound, died because after sustaining severe injury during a football match there, he was prevented from going to hospital. He died from profuse bleeding. Human rights groups saw this as one act of inhumanity too many, especially as Che Ngwa Ghandi had died after being tortured less than a month before.

Another incident worth recalling was the 'arrest' of Fru Ndi and his supporters during their house arrest. The prisoners were loaded into trucks and taken to Upstation Bamenda. The story was that Fru Ndi already had a room at Kondegui Maximum Security Prison in Yaoundé and 172 diehard SDF supporters, among them Justice Nyo Wakai a retired judge and Ophelia Sendze a lawyer, were taken there in inhuman conditions after they had been set free by three High Court judges, Justices Richard Fombe, A.A. Epie and Alexander Forbellah.

The 172 were held in detention in various concentration camps at Upstation. The soldiers obviously moved Fru Ndi out of his residence not with the intention of taking him to Yaoundé but to disprove all those who said it was impossible to move the SDF chairman out of his Ntarinkon residence. Other stories alleged that the soldiers actually wanted the anti-government journalist Boh Herbert held alongside others in Fru Ndi's house. Contrary to the story that only the other prisoners were to be taken away and that Fru Ndi opted to accompany them, I learnt that the soldiers actually pushed Fru Ndi into the truck. The prisoners were brought back the same night.

Perhaps the most glaring consequence of the state of emergency was the rise of Anglophone nationalism. The Anglophone elite and many who were convinced Fru Ndi won the 1992 presidential election based on stories from SDF representations at the Supreme Court and the percentages published by the US embassy, felt the SDF chairman had been treated with such ignominy because he was an Anglophone. It is significant that the first declaration Fru Ndi made after the state of emergency was lifted was 'I will teach Biya as an Anglophone'.

Fru Ndi had good reasons to be embittered. Apart from

Anglophones, only the Bamilikes showed concern while he was under house arrest. Most Francophones fled or were too scared to visit him. Some even mocked him. His pronouncement that he would fight Biya from an Anglophone platform was therefore a source of inspiration to those who felt it was time out for hypocrisy and that the Union English and French Cameroon needed redefinition.

Interestingly, the proposal for an Anglophone conference was published not by *The Cameroon Post* or *The Herald*, the two prominent Anglophone newspapers at the time but by a little known weekly publication called the *Sketch*. Anglophones embraced the idea and started looking up to it.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that the soldiers who were sent to enforce the state of emergency were only too glad to leave Bamenda, so scared were they of Takumbeng women. But they also had sound reasons for nostalgia because they left behind free food, drinks and friendly women.



Patriots and Gangsters

Dictatorship thrives on the ignorance of the masses. That is why the dictatorship of Big Brother in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* has as one of its governing slogans 'Ignorance is strength'. Mind poisoning is employed where knowledge prevails. This justifies the second slogan 'freedom is slavery'. But the policy which is used on a permanent basis is summed up by the slogan 'war is peace'. The ruler chooses war not because he loves bloodshed but because it is an easier weapon to wield than diplomacy and sound administration. Diplomacy requires the power of logic which the dictator is highly deficient in. War is therefore used where intellect fails. To divert the attention of the governed from his bad and inefficient administration, the regime of Big Brother in Oceania makes sure that the Ministry of Peace (MINIPAX) is constantly churning up rumours of war against its neighbours, Eastasia and Eurasia. George Orwell's world consists of only these three nations.

The hullabaloo about the war between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi Peninsula was nothing but a diversionary ploy by the government of late Nigerian President Sani Abacha and Cameroon's Paul Biya. The politics of diversion has been Biya's stock in trade since 1990 because he hates democracy though he wouldn't stop talking it. When the SDF was launched in 1990 and six people were shot to death in Bamenda, he quickly used the World Cup in Italy to divert the attention of the Cameroonian people who were particularly vexed by the killings.

During the Ghost Towns Operation in 1991, the regime and its acolytes like late Jean Fochive and Paul Nji Atanga used every strategy they could conceive of to break it. Atanga bought 72 taxis which Fochive appointed security men to drive in Douala where the Ghost Town Operation was crippling the economy. When this failed, the regime was left with no other alternative than to announce a tripartite conference in 1991 to divert the public's attention from the idea of a sovereign national conference which was the justification for the Ghost Towns and civil disobedience campaigns embarked upon by the Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations. The Tripartite Conference as earlier

indicated, was followed by parliamentary and then presidential elections. When Fru Ndi and the Union for Change claimed that their victory has been stolen, Biya slammed a state of emergency on the Northwest. The world forgot about the 'stolen victory' and became concerned about human rights abuses. Before the state of emergency was lifted, the regime had conceived another strategy to enable the public forget it. Bill Clinton's inauguration became a Cameroonian affair with the media sustaining a sterile debate on who was or who was not invited to the inauguration.

I had to introduce this long digression to illustrate the point that Cameroonians and the world do not really see through these strategies. They continue to count on the good faith of the Biya regime believing that the nation is making progress democratically whereas, we are dancing on the spot. We are actually behaving like someone in a rocking chair which is only turning round and not moving forward.

The year 1993 began with a major world event: the inauguration of newly elected US President Bill Clinton. The presence of Fru Ndi at the ceremony raised high expectations among his numerous supporters back home. The SDF chairman was very conscious of this and to keep the flame of their hopes burning, SDF supporters abroad tried to give the impression of conviviality by employing the photo trick. An expert cameraman successfully brought the pictures of Fru Ndi and Clinton together and gave the semblance of two people shaking hands or involved in conversation. The photo trick had been used earlier to substitute the head of a sick white man with that of French President, François Mitterrand in a photo captioned 'The Naked Emperor'. A similar substitution of heads within the same period replaced the heads of Indomitable Lions players with those of politicians believed to be committed to democratic change. Fru Ndi was the goalkeeper of the political team dubbed the Indomitable Lions of Change.

The Clinton-Fru Ndi photo formula achieved the purpose for which it was intended. Cameroonians continued to believe US warships and marines were in *echaquement* preparing to come and topple Biya. It was against a backdrop of this optimism that Fru Ndi and his political allies launched a programme of activities which they were convinced could enable them regain the stolen victory. This programme consisted principally of street demonstrations but what disturbed the government most was the part of the action plan which stated that an announcement would be made on 6 April 1993 which could change the political history of Cameroon. 6 April 1984 is the date on which according to government sources, some disgruntled members of the Republican Guard, the elitist squad responsible for the president's personal safety, tried to overthrow Biya in a coup. The truth which was later made public by a nephew of the

late Forchive was that the regime itself instigated this coup to justify a decision to purge the Republican Guard of northern elements, loyalists of Amadou Ahidjo, Biya's predecessor who formed the bulk of the elitist squad. This revelation only emerged in 2005 and in 1993, 6 April 1994 was still seen by a majority of Cameroonians as the date Biya would be toppled in a military coup and if possible killed. So it remained a nightmare to regime loyalists. This explains why Biya was furious about this part of the programme and resolved to crack down on it and why the very first demonstrations that were held in Bamenda on 25 January 1993 resulted in the shooting to death of two SDF vanguards. The brutality demonstrated by gendarmes on this occasion was unprecedented. For the first time, gendarmes descended on Takumbeng women, beating them with truncheons. The gendarmes warned that if Takumbeng women dared to strip as they always had in front of them, they would be raped. The women fought back with sticks and some sustained serious injuries and later died. At the Bamenda mortuary where the corpses of the two vanguards were deposited, Fru Ndi openly wept. I had been in Cow Street and helped to convey a 13-year-old boy shot in the chest to hospital. The wound was so large that I could see his heart. The incident sparked the first open crisis in the SDF when Ben Muna, the SDF campaign manager questioned the rationale behind the street demonstrations. Muna who was then in France granted an interview to a French magazine *Jeune Afrique* in which he stated that it was irresponsible of Fru Ndi to send people onto the streets to be killed so as to recover the so-called stolen victory. Suppose it was Fru Ndi that had won, would he have folded his arms and watched while Biya's supporters stormed the streets? This was Muna's question.

The interview sparked fireworks. Fru Ndi convened a rally at which he indicted Ben Muna. He admitted that Muna had a right to air his view on the killings but said but should have done so within SDF circles instead of 'tearing the party to shreds' or 'stripping it naked in a foreign magazine'. Boh Herbert proceeded to publish an article titled 'Bernard Muna and Fru Ndi the Betrayal' in reaction to one published by a non-committal paper 'Bernard Muna and Fru Ndi, The Divorce'. Boh's publication was particularly invective against Ben Muna and was unmistakably inspired by Shakespeare's Julius Caesar who on, the point of death, is pained by the fact that his best friend, Brutus, is among the conspirators that stabbed him. 'Et tu Brute?' (You too, Brutus?). The Muna family is yet to forgive or forget Herbert Boh's statement in the write-up 'a good Muna is a dead one'. The conclusion of the crisis was the dismissal of Ben Muna as the campaign manager.

News of the conflict within the SDF sparked by Ben Muna's criticism of Fru Ndi and his political allies was highly welcome to the

New Deal regime which saw in the divided opposition house a sign of its eventual collapse.

Kontchou Kougmeni, government spokesman, didn't wait for the opposition house that had caught to fall of its own volition. He employed all his wit and sophism to pull it down. To achieve this, press conferences became a daily affair at which his capacity for churning out 'truthful lies' earned for him the nickname 'Gobbels'. Gobbels was Adolph Hitler's minister who employed lies as a political strategy, carrying further than anybody else the concept that in order to make a lie convincing, it should be told several times and loudly enough to sound like the truth. One of Kontchou's most memorable performances was his ability to confuse the public with details about the deaths of Che Ngwa Ghandi and Che Godfrey. Cameroonians knew the difference but the international community didn't. although using the surname or denominator, 'Che' Kontchou was able to convince or at least confound those who were ignorant of the facts and conveyed the information that Che Ngwa Ghandi was the same Che Godfrey that had died after sustaining severe injuries during a football match at Fru Ndi's residence. It was unfortunate that Ghandi's Christian name was unknown to the general public and Konthou wanted the world to think his baptismal name was Godfrey.

With this act of sophism, Kontchou played on the psyche of non-Cameroonians who were confused about the torture of Ghandi and either launched a fresh investigation into the matter or went away with the impression that nobody was tortured to death in any detention camp. But Kontchou's masterpiece remains his misapplication of the facts about the call to boycott French goods by the opposition. The call was first made while Fru Ndi was under house arrest by opposition supporters convinced that Biya was sitting tight as a result of French support. Strengthened by the allegation that Biya would have given up power after the 1992 presidential polls, he changed his mind on the advice of Yvon Omnes, a former French ambassador to Cameroon whom Biya retained when he retired and paid a staggering FCFA 5 million a month.

The call for a boycott was published in both French and English newspapers in 1991 and intensified while Fru Ndi was under house arrest. Brasseries, a brewery company and fueling companies in which the French had shares, suffered considerably. Fru Ndi and his allies made the boycott campaign a cardinal point in their campaigns.

Incidentally, some armed robbers around the same time targeted those same French fuel stations in Bamenda. The bandits attacked in broad daylight and went away with fabulous sums of money. Kontchou knew these were highwaymen but decided to interpret and exploit it to the CPDM's advantage. During one of his press conferences after the 25

March killings in Bamenda, the minister of communication announced that the Union for Change opposition group had introduced urban terrorism as a strategy to seize power.

Besides the theatrics of the government's spin doctor, the Biya regime, which truly believed that a military offensive was to be launched on 6 April, decided to use security helicopters to survey opposition strongholds. On D-Day, thousands of combat-ready troops stormed Bamenda. There was, however, a feeling of anti-climax when instead of a military confrontation. Fru Ndi issued a press release announcing that he was going to convene a sovereign national conference. So welcome was this development that those who had quit the Northwest fearing a holocaust started returning the next day. At the height of the panic that followed the opposition's plan of action, the Regime arrested Hameni Bieleu, the Union for Change's campaign manager. It was Hameni Bieleu who had earlier declared Fru Ndi the victor in the 1997 polls at a press conference at Ntamulung Church Centre in Bamenda. He was the chairman of the Union of the Democratic Forces of Cameroon, known by its French acronym UFDC. Hameni Bieleu was later released when it became clear that military force was not being contemplated by the Union for Change. The government's fear of Hameni Bieleu stemmed from the much publicized information that he had a PhD in atomic physics and was consequently capable of manufacturing explosives.

Though the Union for Change didn't declare war, the government was still apprehensive because Fru Ndi was not somebody to be taken lightly. His daredevil launch of the SDF had impressed on the regime that Fru Ndi was capable of anything. During the state of emergency, there was a nagging fear that Fru Ndi could, whenever he wanted, defy the presence of troops and break out of the 'iron curtain' of soldiers that held him at Ntarinkon Palace. For this reason, Biya decided to counter the idea of the sovereign national conference by announcing a similar political rendezvous. The *Grand Debat* as he called it was interpreted to mean a large-scale constitutional debate.

But before coming back to that, I deem it necessary in the interest of those who never witnessed the event to recount the circumstances that led up to the 6 April 1984 coup attempt and why the bare mention of it sends shivers down the spines of Biya loyalists.



Recollections of a Faked Coup Plot

A coup d'état is the method used most commonly in Africa to replace regimes that resist all forms of change through the ballot box. Nigeria tops the continent in the number of coups and attempted coups since independence. It is therefore no surprise that *Anthills of the Savannah*, the best publication on regimes created by coups, is written by a Nigerian, the often-quoted Chinua Achebe.

Coups are, however, not always plotted by the military. Dictatorial regimes make use of spin doctors, appointed for that purpose, to organize coups and justify harsh reprisals on persons they find too powerful to sack, or whose dismissal without proper justification could increase rather than dampen public sympathy for them.

Cameroon had its first experience of a coup and how to suppress them on 6 April 1984. To understand this event properly, I think a detailed account of the circumstances that led up to it would be useful. I am highly indebted to the veteran journalist, the late Jerome Fultang Gwellem, for his account in a publication entitled *Paul Biya: Hero of the New Deal*.

The Ahidjo-led Conspiracy

Gwellem's book begins with an account of how Paul Biya took over Cameroon's leadership from Amadou Ahidjo. Ahidjo had resigned from his position as Cameroon's head of state on 2 November 1982, although the decision was only made public on 6 November. In his resignation speech, Ahidjo, who hailed from the North Province of Cameroon, said he was handing over to Paul Biya and called on Cameroonians to rally behind the new head of state. (Biya hails from the South Province which is dominated by the Beti ethnic group.) Ahidjo had ruled the country with an iron fist since 1958 when he assumed the office of premier of the then East Cameroon. His 25-year rule witnessed a rebellion by the Union des Populations of Cameroun (UPC), a political party fighting for the total independence of Cameroon from France. The French used Ahidjo to crush the rebellion in a ruthless manner. His era witnessed the end of multiparty politics in September 1966 when four parties formed the

Cameroon National Union (CNU), which then became the only party in Cameroon for close to 18 years.

In 1972 the federated states of East and West Cameroon were replaced by a unitary constitution which ushered in the United Republic of Cameroon. Cameroonians had never known another president since independence. Ahidjo was an institution, a power broker and in the public's eye, a demi-god. His style brought to mind that of the French King Louis XIV who was the incarnation of the state. '*L'état c'est moi*' ('I am the state'), he is quoted as saying. He is also quoted as saying: 'The thing is legal because I have said so' and 'After me, the flood', an accurate prediction of the chaos that took place in France in 1789.

Ahidjo was extremely powerful, which explains why the announcement was received with such shock and disbelief. Between his resignation and the formal handing over to his successor, Ahidjo, who resigned on medical grounds on the advice of his doctors, rejected all pleas by his cronies to stay on. His doctors had told him his health was failing.

The Devil's Philosophy

Ahidjo had resigned on the understanding that he would retain the position of CNU national chairman, a condition Biya would have been committing political suicide if he coveted without first having a grip on the nation's top job. As soon as he had it, he logically wanted to be in full control. The devil's philosophy that once out of a chair that chair should be kicked aside came to play not long after Biya was sworn in.

He began by sacking six cabinet members who he knew were Ahidjo loyalists in three marathon cabinet reshuffles. That of 18 June 1983 removed Victor Ayissi Mvodo, the all-powerful minister of territorial administration, Sadou Daoudou, the secretary general at the presidency who is the *de facto* vice president of the republic and four others.

French President François Mitterrand, who paid a visit to Cameroon two days later (on 20 June 1983) assured Biya of his support. The sacking took place five months after Ahidjo had granted an interview with the state-owned newspaper *Cameroon Tribune* stating that the CNU would initiate government policy which Biya would execute. As proof of how powerful he still was, Ahidjo sacked three top government officials, among them, Moussa Yaya Sarki Farda, the second vice speaker of the National Assembly and stripped two MPs of their immunities. After that, he toured the country to explain his actions and drum up support.

Biya saw in Ahidjo's move an indication that he (Biya) could also be disciplined if, according to the old patriarch, he erred. He thus resolved not to wait for the intended blow. On 22 August 1993, Biya

struck. He openly denounced Ahidjo in a nationwide broadcast on Radio Cameroon. (There was no television then.)

‘I am addressing you today under very grave circumstances,’ the president’s speech went. ‘The national security services have arrested persons whose mission was to undermine the security of the republic. These persons against whom sanctions commensurate with their criminal activities will be taken according to the law have made full confessions. In a democratic country like ours, it is my duty to keep the Cameroonian people who are sovereign and masters of their destiny, aware of this situation. When I acceded to the helm of the state on 6 November 1982, I took a solemn oath before all Cameroonians not to fail in my duties as custodian of the constitution and institutions and as the guarantor of national sovereignty and integrity.’

He announced that he had taken prompt political, military and administrative measures to safeguard national unity. The political measures were the splitting of Ahidjo’s North Province into three provinces: the North Province, the Far North Province and the Adamaoua Province. Although he claimed to have done it to bring the administration nearer to the people, as requested by the people themselves, his real intention was to weaken Ahidjo’s power base. To disguise this intention, Biya also split his own political base, the Centre Province, in two, bringing into existence the Centre and South Provinces. Militarily, he set up an armed forces general staff. And politically, Biya reshuffled his cabinet, purging it of real or suspected Ahidjo loyalists. By the mere act of announcing the ‘conspiracy and the measures he had taken’, Biya endeared himself to Cameroonians because his predecessor had never deemed it relevant to talk about why he took decisions.

After an extraordinary parliamentary session on 25 January 1984, the Biya regime did what Ahidjo with all his ruthlessness was too cautious even to contemplate. The name ‘United Republic of Cameroon’, which showed the country’s status as a union of more than one state, was replaced by the Republic of Cameroon, the name East Cameroon had used before unification with West Cameroon. The change of name was a decision which the SCNC, the vanguard movement for the liberation of Anglophone Cameroonians, later used to pat Biya on the back. When they were accused of planning secession, SCNC activists argued that East Cameroon had seceded first.

Artful Dodger

Biya had tactfully avoided Ahidjo’s name in his address because he knew that his accomplices would do so during the trial which was imminent after two of Ahidjo’s loyalists were arrested. These were Major Ibrahim Oumarou, Ahidjo’s former attendant at the presidential palace, and

Captain Adamou Salatou, the ex-president's former bodyguard.

Ahidjo was in the south of France when the arrests took place and promptly granted a press conference to Radio France International denying that there had been a coup plot and accused his successor of 'coup phobia'. To worsen matters for himself and loyalists in Cameroon, Ahidjo regretted having ceded power to Biya and called on fellow Cameroonians to reject the new president.

Biya's reaction after the interview was to reshuffle his cabinet, organize a presidential election and secure a five-year mandate for himself. To give a semblance of democracy, he announced that he needed challengers but the conditions to be fulfilled by such a challenger were such that Almighty God Himself would have had considerable difficulties fulfilling them. Such a challenger was to collect 30 signatures of top administrators and prominent personalities in each of the ten provinces. These were all people who enjoyed their positions and wealth thanks to the government.

Cameroon had just been handed over by a ruthless dictator who eliminated all his opponents without compunction. Nobody in his right senses was expected to challenge his successor even though his *'tongue dropped manna'*. On 14 January 1984 Cameroonians went to the polls and, according to official results, Biya secured 99.98%, of the votes, slightly less than the customary 99.99% achieved during the Ahidjo era.

His next move was to reshuffle his cabinet again. He dropped the post of prime minister. With this, his constitutional successor in case of death or any other cause was the speaker of the National Assembly, who would have the right to act as the country's leader for between 20 and 45 days until fresh elections were held.

Then he instructed the trial of the two arrested Ahidjo loyalists. A military tribunal set up in Yaoundé opened on 23 February 1984 to try Major Ibrahim Oumarou, aged 43, and Captain Salatou Amadou, aged 38. Ahmadou Ahidjo was notable by his absence. The charges were subversion and conspiracy to commit capital murder and revolution. Ahmadou Ahidjo's other charge was contempt arising from the interview he granted Radio France International in which he defamed President Biya by describing him as 'weak, silly and a hypocrite'. Salatou and Oumarou pleaded guilty and turned down an offer by counsel to defend them. Barrister Yondo, appointed by the court to defend Ahmadou Ahidjo, raised preliminary objections that if his client (Ahidjo) was to be tried in absentia, he needed no counsel. The military prosecutor upheld Yondo's argument.

The overcrowded court listened to Oumarou's evidence attentively when he recalled that in July 1983 Ahidjo called him into his sitting room in Clean, France where they both lived at the time. Looking

tense and nervous, he said Ahidjo told him of 'an important mission' which he would confide in him (Oumarou) and Captain Salatou. Ahidjo revealed the important mission when he (Oumarou) had told him that he was returning to Cameroon on 27 July 1983. 'Do everything to remove President Biya from power, including physical elimination if necessary,' Ahidjo reportedly told Oumarou. Oumarou said that he was shocked and disturbed by that assignment and spent a sleepless night. Mrs Ahidjo, according to Oumarou, was equally disturbed and asked him never to do a thing like that. He had no courage to tell Ahidjo that his wife was against that important assignment.

He left France on 27 July and told Salatou what Ahidjo had said five days later after he arrived in Yaoundé. This followed repeated phone calls from Ahmadou Ahidjo who had apparently become impatient.

Captain Salatou's and Oumarou's evidence agreed. Oumarou added that they had decided to play for time and decided to approach a 'reliable element' among President Biya's security guards called Senior Sergeant Etienne Hollong – a well-known sharpshooter with the security services. They were said by witnesses at the Oumarou-Ahidjo-Salatou trial to have been at the meeting at Ibrahim Wadjiri's house on 18 June.

Sergeant Etienne Hollong testified that Captain Salatou and he had met at a snack bar downtown and Salatou was driving him in his (Salatou's) car when he revealed the 'important mission'. After Salatou had analyzed the political situation in the country by accusing President Biya of appointing young, inexperienced people to positions of authority, 'something has to be done before it is too late' Salatou told Sergeant Hollong. Sergeant Hollong said he did not wait any longer and revealed what Salatou had said to the director of the presidential guards who, in his evidence at the trial confirmed Hollong's evidence and added that he had ordered Salatou's arrest. Witnesses at the trial on 24 February, comprising top military officers from the former Northern Province, accepted holding a meeting on 18 June 1983, the same day President Biya reshuffled his cabinet and dropped many influential Ahidjo's appointees.

At the meeting at the home of the delegate general of the national gendarmerie, Mr. Ibrahim Wadjiri, the accounts of witnesses differed. Dr Maikano Abdoulaye said the meeting of the northern officers was 'essentially to ask the northern military elite to remain calm in their posts'.

Another contradiction was made by Colonel Aba Kaka who said the minister himself called them to the meeting 'and informed us of the eventual resignation of ministers of Northern origin' from President Biya's government. He said the minister asked them 'to stay at our posts and keep calm'. Those at the meeting, according to the witness (Aba), included Colonel Oumardjam Yaya, the director of presidential

security, Colonel Ngoura Beladji, commander of the Supreme Military Headquarters and Ibrahim Saleh, the commander of the republican guards. Colonel Ibrahim Saleh said he was invited to the meeting by the minister of armed forces. 'The minister wanted us to be aware of what we were going to do and to take steps to calm our people,' he testified.

The prosecutor demanded the death sentence for Ahidjo alone and life imprisonment for Captain Salatou and Oumarou, while also recommending the trial of Prime Minister Bouba Bello Maigari, Dr Maikano Abdoulaye, the former armed forces minister and Ibrahim Wadjiri, the delegate general for national security for complicity in the plot. In the judgment that followed, Ahidjo, Salatou and Oumarou were sentenced to death. Their properties were also to be seized as part of the punishment. This judgment was passed under Ordinance No. 62 of 12 March 1962. This law, which had been enacted by Ahidjo, left no room for appeal. Only a presidential pardon (clemency) could free those convicted under this law.

The 6 April Attempted Coup

The much talked of coup on 6 April took place while I was a first-year undergraduate at the University of Yaoundé. My residence was only a stone's throw from the military headquarters in Yaoundé. We had to remain indoors and lie on the floor as this was the only means of escaping the bullets that could easily penetrate the thin walls of our houses that were constructed of only sticks and mud. Cooking was also risky as it necessitated standing up or moving about. Luckily, I had some cooked food. I also had *garri* which could be simply soaked in water and eaten. Some of my colleagues later told me they ate raw rice, meat and fish to survive the two days that the shooting lasted. Sleep was also impossible because of the zooming of military jets overhead and machine gun fire.

Not everybody was wise or cautious. Some civilians, like the proverbial inquisitive monkey, got caught in crossfire when they went out to witness the shooting. They erroneously thought that bullets were meant only for soldiers and the gendarmes. Others had to surrender their civilian clothes at gunpoint to fleeing rebels when the coup collapsed and this made them targets of elimination by loyalist soldiers. Some of the rebels successfully escaped. The most-quoted example is Captain Guerandi Mbara who successfully left Cameroon and sought refuge in Burkina Faso. His name has since caused trepidation among Biya loyalists who see in him the potential of a Laurent Kabila who could come back at any time with a rebel force to kick Biya out of Etoudi Palace. Cameroonians resident outside Yaoundé became aware that something was amiss when they could not get the routine 6:30 or 7:30 news in English and French because, unknown to many at the time, provincial

stations of Radio Cameroon could not relay the mother station in Yaoundé on 6 April 1984 for the news in English. The blackout continued without explanation till normal work commenced at 7:30 in the provinces. Speculation and anxiety began to spread. Workers left their offices to besiege transistor sets and learn for the first time from Africa No. 1, Radio France International and the BBC that there was heavy fighting in Yaoundé.

At 10.am the BBC reported that the radio house and the presidential palace were besieged by rebel forces who were being counter-attacked by forces loyal to President Biya. No word had been heard of the president, while some people had been taken hostage. The BBC later announced again that the rebels had broadcast a statement on Radio Yaoundé setting up a 'superior military council', cutting air, land and sea links, suspending the constitution, dissolving Parliament, suspending all political parties, sacking all provincial governors and cutting off all telecommunication links with the outside world. The coup plotters were republican guards led by Ibrahim Saley and Captain Awal Abassi. They had four targets: the presidential palace, the army headquarters, the residence of the chief of staff of the armed forces, General Pierre Semengue and Radio Yaoundé.

At Radio Yaoundé, their first target, the rebels overcame the police guard on duty. Normal broadcast time on Radio Yaoundé was 5.30 am but the rebels stormed the radio house as early as 3 am and easily overcame the police guard. There was heavy rain in Yaoundé that night. When the journalists on the morning shift arrived they were forced to lie flat on the wet grass outside until 8 am when they were bundled into the studios and ordered to set their machines in motion. The rebels did not know how to play the tape of military music they had brought with them. They were assisted by radio staff who, in spite of that, were forced to sit upright until 10 am. To see if their rebellion was succeeding, they frog-marched the radio house technicians into the studio which received worldwide teletyped reports. What they heard was anything but reassuring. *Agence France Presse* (AFP) described the situation in Cameroon as confusing, and said that it was not certain who was in control: President Biya or the rebels. Angered by the report, the rebels, to assure the world that they were in control, needed to broadcast a statement to that effect. Some of them immediately jumped into a Peugeot taking one of the journalists with them. Their destination was Njong Melen to meet their new strongman, Issa Adoum, from whom they recorded a message.

Their radio spokesman, by the name of Captain Abale, hurriedly read the statement on air but the quality of the message and broadcast was poor. This angered the rebels who reacted by insulting and kicking the journalist. Unfortunately, the rebels never knew or had forgotten that

the radio house does not function independently of the transmitters. Technicians at the transmission station, obviously angered by the rough treatment the rebels had given them or out of resentment, had ensured that the two broadcasts of the rebels' address were not heard outside Yaoundé.

While some of the rebels were holding the Radio Yaoundé staff hostage, their colleagues were on the offensive in the field. They captured the residences of General Semengue, Joseph Zambo, Minister delegate at the presidency in charge of relations with the Assembly and that of Mbarga Nguéle, delegate general for national security.

The rebels also encircled the homes of Rene Claude Meka, the director of presidential security, Colonel Ananga, the president of the Yaoundé Military Tribunal, and captured the residence of the minister of armed forces, but he had sneaked out and set up a secret command post. From here, he contacted loyal units to launch an immediate counterattack on the rebels before the rebels cut telephone lines. Knowing that to counter the rebellion forces loyal to Biya would arrive from other parts of the country, the rebels decided to take over Yaoundé International Airport. At the airport that day at around 7 am passengers fled, abandoning baggage and embarkation cards when they saw the rebels arriving. The drama at the airport was vividly recounted by a resident close to it who opted for anonymity. The witness intended to travel to Douala that day.

'At 7 am on 6 April we were already at Yaoundé Airport checking in to fly to Douala.' Shortly after boarding passes had been given to them, he recalled, the passengers started discussing the serious shooting that had taken place the previous night. While they were still waiting for the plane, they saw tanks and military hardware approaching. Everybody fled in different directions. Not long after, the narrator recounted, some helicopters manned by loyal forces arrived and hovered around the airport surveying rebel positions there. 'Fighting started immediately the infantry came from Ebolowa and gunfire almost deafened our ears. Paratroopers arrived almost immediately and we could see the military aircraft spitting fire on the rebels.'

The rebels started fleeing after some of their colleagues were killed. Some put up the hands in the traditional gesture of surrender. Meanwhile, the task force set up by the minister of armed forces had begun a counterattack which resulted in the recapture of General Semengue's residence. The army headquarters were retaken and this enabled loyal forces to have access to anti-tank weapons and other equipment necessary to strengthen the counterattack. Next to be liberated was the broadcasting house where rebels had been broadcasting martial music supplied by Lieutenant Elie Zebobe, the producer of the weekly

armed forces programme. More troops from Koutaba and Douala had been flown in through Yaoundé airport which had been captured after an hour's resistance by rebel forces.

By Saturday morning all the key targets held by rebels had been recaptured, except the presidency. To minimize damage in the process of recapturing the presidency, which the rebels had controlled for 24 hours, the task force used paratroop units that landed in the presidential grounds with combat aircraft, which destroyed tanks and sent rebel forces running in all directions. The gendarmerie school at Camp Yaya was retaken soon after that.

Seeing that the rebellion had collapsed, the rebels began fleeing, some stripping off their military uniforms and forcing civilians to undress and surrender their clothes which the rebels hoped would enable them to escape disguised as civilians. But their closely shaven hair betrayed them and many ended up being arrested. At the broadcasting house, the journalists, after being freed, remained to play reassuring Cameroonian music, despite their hunger which the rebels had tried to 'relieve' by offering them cigarettes!

As all this went on, the whereabouts of President Biya were still unknown. However, on the evening of Saturday 7 April 1984, the national anthem and Biya's speech ended speculation. In his speech he said some people thirsting for power were responsible for the coup and in an apparent effort to prevent ethnic cleansing, said these rebels did not come from a particular tribe or part of the country. But this did not prevent the stigmatization of Northerners, particularly those from Ahidjo's Garoua stronghold by Biya loyalists, especially those of Beti extraction. Of the 1053 people arrested, 617 were freed by the Yaoundé military tribunal. Out of the 436 who were tried, 46 were sentenced to death, 2 were jailed for life, while 183 were given prison sentences ranging from 2 to 20 years and 183 were discharged and acquitted.

What the Papers Said

Reporting the coup attempt, *The Economist* (14 April 1984) said: 'West Africa is a coup-watchers delight... plotters in three countries — Ghana, Liberia, and Niger — was unlucky as the junior officers who tried to shoot up Yaoundé, last week'. *Newsweek* (16 April 1984) commented: 'Cameroon has been one of the stable countries in Africa. It is certainly among the wealthiest. An oil-producing nation, it is one of the few in the region capable of feeding itself. ... There are 1,200 Americans in Cameroon, most of whom work for the Mobil, Shell and Gulf Oil companies. None was hurt in the fighting, the latest flare-up in a longstanding rivalry between President Paul Biya and his predecessor, Amadou Ahidjo.' It further quoted Amadou Ahidjo's statement to Radio

Monaco as follows: 'If my supporters are involved in a coup, they will gain the upper hand, I think.' He (Ahidjo) was wrong. Cameroon's 8,000-man army remained loyal to Biya, and the coup failed. 'The next move is now up to Biya', concluded *Newsweek*.

West Africa (14 May 1984) said: 'Nothing fails like a failed coup, and in particular one seems to have been fairly inchoate and negative in motivation'. *Talking Drums* (19 September 1983): 'By his own admission, Ahidjo was well aware that Biya was weak...why then did he choose him, what had the people of Cameroon done to deserve his imposing a leader on them that he knew to be weak?' *Cameroon Times* (25 April 1984): 'we would like to put it on record that since 1961, the Northwest and Southwest Provinces have always remained loyal to the institutions of this country. They have always mobilized against all attempt to destabilize its legal government, and their militancy in the national party has been very exemplary. This they have done notwithstanding the grave injustices and persecution they have suffered since reunification and particularly under Ahidjo regime.'

Africa Now (May 1984, p. 23) wrote as follows: 'In France, Ahidjo refused to admit that he had had any part in the coup attempt, although there were signs that he would be made the scapegoat. Cameroon Foreign Minister Felix Tony Mbog, speaking on French television, all but laid the blame directly on ex-president. ...Ahidjo has hidden home in Grasse, in the south of France, and also a residence in Dakar, but he is condemned to eternal exile, living on the money he managed to bank abroad during his presidency and perhaps, too, on the charity of a few other heads of state. Unsubstantiated reports suggest, however, that Ahidjo's decision to quit the presidency was prompted by medical advice he had sought in France which stated his health was failing and that he would not live long. But a second medical opinion also in France suggested otherwise. ... One explanation of Ahidjo's behaviour is that he suspected the French government had tried to play tricks on him to get him out of power in Cameroon.'

Victor Ndovi's report in *New Africa* in May 1984 (p. 59) claimed: 'It was not questions of North versus South or religious persuasion which prompted the putsch, but the defence of advantages lost or threatened. It has been clearly established that many of Ahidjo's appointees occupied posts, which guaranteed them a huge source of wealth'.

Dr Victor Wan-Tatah writing in *West Africa* (30 April 1984) said: 'The Cameroonian leader can be encouraged to continue with his policy of "Morality" and "Rigour" because he has the backing of many Cameroonians. At the same time, he should not forget his earlier promises and commitment to freedom of speech and to economic and socio-political justice. This entails among other urgent items on the

national agenda, righting the wrongs and injustices of Ahidjo's regime especially in the treatment of sizeable Anglophone minority.'

Jonathan Derrick in *African Business* (May 1984 p. 19): 'Under Ahidjo, tight centralized control over the economy, with him watching over all, took on a new dimension when oil exports began in 1978. Oil income has been kept a close official secret in a way scarcely paralleled in the world; oil revenues are separated from the general budget and dealt with by the President's office. ...Only Ahidjo and few others, until his resignation, knew how the oil money was used. Cameroonians have made several good guesses.'

Talking Drum's comment in its 16 April 1984 issue said: 'While extending our congratulations to President Biya, we would urge him to consider the events as a God-sent opportunity to realize that opposition to him exists and should be listened to. ... It would be worth the while to consider that if the coup had succeeded, far from being hunted down today, Colonel Ibrahim Saleh would have been telling Cameroonians and the world that he and his colleagues had moved to save the country from wide-ranging corruption, dictatorial tendencies, tribal divisions, and a rule of terror'.



Constructional Acrobats & the Anglophone Problem

In Part One of *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift presents the politicians of his fictitious state of Liliput as expert rope dancers and acrobats. Between 1993 and 1996, Biya proved himself an expert in that art after announcing the *Grand Débat*. While the public was mobilizing to participate in this grand constitutional forum, the regime played the chameleon again. It announced that what was going to take place was a 'Large Debate' and not '*Grand Débat*'. This meant that instead of a multitude attending, only a selected few would attend in person, while the rest participated by phone, fax and written contributions.

The regime was still haunted by the fear that if it permitted any massive gathering on constitutional matters, the opposition would convert it into a sovereign national conference. Ahead of the constitutional debate earmarked for 1994, a committee to draft a new constitution for the country was appointed at the head of which Biya placed the controversial Joseph Owona, considered by many, but more by himself, as the country's leading expert in field. In SDF circles, however, he was held in little regard by the majority, which judged him not by his legal professionalism but by his morals, which were anything but enviable. Most of those who had attended the University of Yaoundé while he was a lecturer in the Faculty of Law recalled how a woman stormed the lecture hall while he was teaching and gripped him by the throat for making her pregnant and then abandoning her. The desperate woman is said to have been found dead a few weeks later in very cloudy circumstances, causing many to suspect that Owona had a hand in her death.

Owona also had an unenviable reputation as one who believed in the use of the fist rather than the tongue to win arguments, despite being a trained lawyer. Stories were peddled about how he engaged in fisticuffs with Aso'o Emana, one of Biya's generals. He was later reported to have invited Ndzana Seme, a fellow Beti and publisher of *Le Front Independent*, a newspaper highly critical of the Biya regime. Ndzana exchanged blows with him because of the critical stand of the journalist. Ndana Seme was

expected to 'toe the line' since he was Beti and, therefore, of the ruling clan. But the journalist was determined to act according to his conscience. The journalist was later sent to jail for publishing details of a private conversation in which Owona confided in him that Biya would be president for 29 years, thus keeping power much longer than Ahidjo.

Even from the viewpoint of constitutional drafting, Owona was seen as no model. He was alleged to have drafted the constitution that transformed Jean Bedel Bokassa, a former president of Central Africa, into an emperor and, logically, thus precipitating his overthrow. He was thus suspected of also planning to transform Biya into a power monster.

All these stories fell on Biya's ears like dew drops on a lion's mane. His mind was already made up and he thus was no longer at the mercy of critical analysis.

Politicians and Nationalists

Anglophones who were generally suspicious of the '*Grand Débat*' suddenly became interested after four of their legal experts were appointed to the constitutional drafting committee muted the idea of a federal constitution and proposed an Anglophone conference to debate the matter. It emerged that the four Wise Men, Carson Anyangwe, Simon the Munzu, Ekontang Elad and Benjamin Itoe, had actually drafted the constitution.

The idea of such a conference was received with unprecedented enthusiasm by Anglophone nationalists. Most of them, as earlier indicated, thought the treatment given Fru Ndi and fellow Northwesterners confirmed the status of Anglophones as second-class citizens. The conference was scheduled to be held in Buea on April. (Buea is the capital of the former West Cameroon [Southern Cameroons] and administrative headquarters of the Southwest Province of Cameroon.)

News of the planned conference sent shock waves across Cameroon. In the Francophone part of the country, especially in Yaoundé, the story was not that Anglophones were planning to secede but that they had actually broken away. The Biya regime was the most frightened. That was why everything humanly possible was done to ensure the meeting was never held in a public place, especially the spacious Buea town hall.

Denying Anglophones the right to meet even on their own territory fuelled public interest in the conferences. It is believed that the impressive attendance of approximately 5000 Anglophones at Mount Mary Maternity was the outcome of the regime's efforts to forestall it. Those who attended include traditional rulers, politicians, academics, religious authorities and elite of Northwest and Southwest origins. It was presumably from attending that meeting that Cardinal Christian Tum

conceived the definition of an Anglophone as anybody whose parents hailed from the Northwest and Southwest Provinces. His definition contradicts those of people like Victor Julius Ngoh and Ndeh Ntumazah who determined one's right to be called an Anglophone by the ability to speak English, being born in one of the two provinces or having grown up or gone to school there.

The meeting on 2 and 3 April was intended to prepare a common position ahead of the reform of Cameroon's constitution in 1994. During the two-day conference chaired by Ekontang Elad and with Francis Wache as Rapporteur, the Anglophones traced their history from when they entered into the Union with East Cameroon in 1961. They recalled the systematic destruction of their hegemony, their democratic heritage from the British and their economy and concluded that they had had a raw deal. They summed up these grievances in a document titled 'The Buea Declaration' that condemned the subjugation of Anglophones in Cameroon to the status of second-class citizens and demanded a return to the original two-state arrangement in 1961. Critics of the document described the grievances in it as 'both real and imagined', adding that it was 'emotional and sentimental', as if there was any difference in the two words.

When the Biya regime failed to grant their requests, the second All Anglophone Conference, AAC 11, was held in Bamenda from 29 April to 2 May 1994 after a desperate attempt by the security forces to prevent it. So determined was the regime that it violated its own law on privacy. Against a public outcry against sacrilege, troops invaded the Catholic Church, Big Mankon and Big Mankon where the Metropolitan Cathedral is found and beat up the principal of Our lady of Lourdes Secondary School who just happened to be passing by.

The occasion also witnessed another ugly scene. After failing to stop the deliberations, the regime was left with no option but to infiltrate the meetings that were held in very unstable circumstances. The Gang of Five as the infiltrators were called by Southern Cameroons activists was led by Christopher Nsahlai, a controversial diplomat and politician.

AAC 11 ended with the transformation of the AAC into the Southern Cameroons People Conference (SCPC) out of which emerged the Southern Cameroons National Council, the SCNC. It also drew up a document titled 'The Bamenda Proclamation' which was much harder than the Buea Declaration. It stated that if the government persisted in its refusal to engage in meaningful constitutional talks with the Southern Cameroons 'within a reasonable time' the Council should proclaim the revival and sovereignty of the Southern Cameroons and take the necessary steps to defend the said territory.

When by 1995 the Biya regime had still not held the said

constitutional talks, a Southern Cameroons Delegation, including the late ST Muna and J.n Foncha Anglophone architects of the union with East Cameroon, left for New York. They later returned with the UN flag whose origins they refused to disclose and after a symbolic crossing of the Moungo Bridge, toured the two Anglophone provinces amidst intimidation, especially from Peter Oben Ashu, then Southwest governor.

Elad, Anyangwe and Munzu, Chairman, Secretary General and Spokesman of the council, tried to frustrate Cameroon's admission into the Commonwealth in 1995, triggered by a bill in Parliament and given greater momentum by the visit two years earlier of Emeka Anyaoku, the Nigerian-born secretary general of the Commonwealth at the time. They wanted a Quebec-style independence to be granted to the Southern Cameroons, after which it would be admitted into the gentlemen's club. They even travelled to Auckland, New Zealand where the decision on admittance was to take place, but to no avail.

The struggle for the independence of Southern Cameroons began to take a downward turn when Elad quit the helm after signing a controversial accord with Simon Achidi Achu, then prime minister of Cameroon. Details of the accord were not made public but it was generally accepted that the radical stand of the Southern Cameroonian leadership had been compromised. The SCNC which had since championed the Anglophone leadership then began to amble and totter under the leadership of Retired Ambassador Henry Fossung and then Ndoki Mukete. It was Mukete who made many awful declarations, among them the statement 'If I am given 100 million FCFA I will declare the independence of Southern Cameroons'

On 31 December 1999, between 11:30 and midnight, Frederick Ebong, a magistrate by training who was chairman of the SCNC strategic committee did something unusual. His critics described it as foolhardy. He led a group of about eight people to Radio Buea where they overcame the policeman on duty and journalist on anchor, then broadcast a recorded message announcing the restoration of the independence of Southern Cameroons. Members of the group consisted of Chief Ayamba Ette Otun and James Sabum, who since has been indefatigable in the struggle. Ndoki Mukete was so frightened by the act that he resigned as SCNC chairman, declaring that he had a family to take care of and was not prepared for any trouble or mayhem. Ebong and his group were later arrested and detained for 14 months each in Yaoundé. On his release, Ebong spent a short time in Cameroon and then left for Nigeria. He is in the US at the time of writing.

The SCNC has since then become a divided house but the one headed by Chief Ayamba, assisted by Nfor Ngala Nfor, former SDF political affairs committee chairman, is recognized by the majority of

Anglophones as the authentic group, despite complaints that its present leadership has exceeded its mandate.

The group took the Southern Cameroons case to the African Commission for Human and People's Rights in Banjul, just as the 1992 post-election victims. Government reacted by creating its own SCNC, headed by Chief Oben assisted by Samuel Tita. The pro-government group also went to the Gambia calling for the withdrawal of the case but were turned away with a reply that one cannot legally or logically call for the withdrawal of a case he or she did not file.

The most dramatic stage of the struggle was when some extremists in the struggle allowed themselves to be manipulated to become actors in stage-managed terrorist attacks on the Biya regime. But before narrating the strange happenings that constituted the attacks, it is necessary to point out one aspect of the struggle in which all Anglophones were united – acquiring the Cameroon General Certificate of Education examination, the GCE.

The GCE Crisis

It all began in 1993 when examiners of the GCE Board refused to mark the June GCE session. The examiners, operating under the banner of the Teachers Association of Cameroon, (TAC) argued that the questions that year were poorly set and moderated. TAC was led by Andrew Azong-Wara, a physics teacher at the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology, Bambili. He was assisted by Sammy Arrey Mbi, an English literature teacher at the Government Bilingual High School (GBHS) in Bamenda, who was the secretary general, and John Fodje, a geography teacher.

TAC also picked holes in the financial management of the board. This mismanagement began during the tenure of George Ngangoh, then minister of national education who allegedly embezzled GCE money. He was sacked and replaced by Robert Mbella Mbappe, who did nothing to improve the situation. After the GCEs had been sat in May, the examiners refused to undertake marking in protest against the non-payment of their dues. They also insisted on the creation of a board to manage the GCE examinations. All attempts to persuade them to change their minds failed. Intimidation followed. Stories were circulated to the effect that the Biya regime at the most critical part of the struggle contemplated the physical elimination of Azong-Wara, who many of its top officials considered the author of the most sublime embarrassment it ever had. But the plot was never executed because the TAC [resident was related by marriage to General James Tataw, one of the country's top military officials. Azong-Wara and the TAC were also fully backed by a new organization, the Cameroon Anglophone Parents and Teachers'

Association of Cameroon (CAPTAC). Officials and sympathizers of these two groups were attacked with truncheons and water canons when they shifted battle grounds to the nation's capital. Many of them sustained injuries but they didn't give in.

With the failure of both cajolery and intimidation, the Biya regime did something perfectly unacademic: it sent teachers to cart away the unmarked GCE scripts from Bamenda where the correction exercise had been programmed to take place. The papers were not only dumped into military trucks but transported without proper supervision to Yaoundé, with the result that many of the scripts were damaged by rain. To make matters worse, Mbella Mbappe and his collaborators hired some Anglophone traitors and inexperienced markers to correct the scripts. Francophones are said to have been conscripted to take part in the exercise.

The news that the papers had been taken away from Bamenda and, worse still, were being corrected by charlatans sparked wild street protests in Bamenda, championed by GCE candidates. The protests reached their climax when Fon Martin Fobuzie Asanji, the Northwest Delegate of National Education, was taken hostage when he came out to address the angry candidates and their sympathizers. The delegate was however wise enough to restrain combat-ready troops who wanted to use physical force against the 'hostage takers'.

The students' action achieved the desired results. A prime ministerial decree was signed creating the Cameroon GCE Board, with Buea designated as its headquarters. Mbella Mbappe who had done everything to prevent the establishment of the Board, was ordered by none other than President Biya to travel to Buea for its installation, something he did amidst boos and jeers from GCE candidates who rejoiced in seeing the Education Minister's plans in disarray.

The taking hostage of the Northwest education delegate was, however, only the immediate cause. TAC, CAPTAC and concerned Anglophones in the ministry of national education had been working behind the scenes with Simon Achidi Achu to put in place the structures. Achidi Achu, because of his position, was bound to play a controversial role. He openly condemned the protest by the candidates, while secretly assisting TAC in working towards the accomplishment of the GCE Board project. While many applauded him for his hard work as an Anglophone, his critics peddled stories that he did so because his daughter, a GCE candidate and supporter of the GCE Board project, was pressing him to sign the decree that would create the board.

After the setting up of the board, the examiners wanted the scripts brought back to Bamenda but Mbella Mbappe considered this an act of provocation and vowed that it would not happen. Fearing that any

further delay would result in a blank academic year to the detriment of Anglophone students and teachers, the examiners decided to go and mark in Yaoundé. Mbella Mbappe, still smarting from the humiliation he had received from the Anglophone teachers, parents and students, decided not to make funds available for the markers. But the examiners, satisfied with their victory, resolved to work in spite of their hunger and thirst. They stormed the GCE marking centre in Essos, Yaoundé and chased away the traitors and remarked all the script they had 'destroyed' by pretending to be marking them.

As if to water down the importance of the Cameroon GCE board, Mbella Mbappe decided to create a separate board to take care of Francophone exams. However instead of applause, he received bitter criticism from fellow Francophones accustomed to 'exam fixing' and the *laissez-faire* manner of marking and announcing exam results. This system was advantageous to mediocre Francophone children. It was common knowledge that Francophone parents of weak students always contacted examiners after the written part of the exams and bribed them, if necessary, so that their children achieved a pass mark. The examiners also awarded 'sexually transmitted marks' to beautiful female students who demonstrated superior 'bottom power' in hotels or other convenient hideouts. The creation of the Francophone exams board was therefore anything but welcomed by a majority of Francophone teachers.

The launch of the Cameroon GCE board was, unfortunately, as difficult as the struggle to make it functional. Azong-wara was appointed as its pioneer registrar and, obviously to frustrate it, the government allocated a fabulous salary to the registrar but failed to make the necessary funds available. To conduct the following marking exercise, the board had to borrow, even from the meanest of sources, Sha houses. (Sha is a form of drink made out of corn and is the main locally produced and consumed drink in Donga-mantung Division in the Northwest Province.)

Board officials came under scathing attack from the Cameroon Teachers' Trade Union (CATTU), which was led by Simon Nkwenti, a no-nonsense reformist and indefatigable critic of corrupt practices in government, a defender of teachers' rights and an upholder of Anglo-Saxon values. CATTU castigated Azong-wara and his collaborators for awarding themselves huge salaries and allowances at the expense of the newly created Board and GCE examiners. After Azong-wara, the next GCE board registrar was Omer Yembe who also received devastating blows from the sledge hammer of CATTU that implemented what could be called 'sloppy reforms', especially the multiple-choice exam system.

The Cameroon GCE board can be seen as the only concrete achievements of Cameroon's Anglophones since unification with their fellow Francophobes in 1961. The struggle that began with the Buea

Declaration continued, with its most radical stage coming in 1997 as can be seen in the next chapter.



Home-Bred Terrorists

The best time to hold peace talks is when guns are booming on the battlefield,' said Paddy Mbawa, the erstwhile publisher of *Cameroon Post*, the most radical and influential English language newspaper in Cameroon at the time of the SDF launch and early confrontations with the Biya regime and just after he had served a prison term for defamation at the notorious New Bell Prison. Mbawa, who has since left the newsroom for the pulpit, was not in fact saying anything new as rebel movements the world over were already applying this philosophy, many of whom were yet to embrace the idea that a ceasefire meant that shooting should stop.

Following its daring publisher's departure, *Cameroon Post* suffered a number of epileptic fits before its final death. But its admirers believe it is simply lying comatose in anticipation of a joyful revival when the trumpet for all dead sensational newspapers sounds on the day of reckoning.

On 27 March 1997, a group of supposed freedom fighters overran a number of military installations in the Northwest, killing three gendarmes in the process. While Fru Ndi and the SDF interpreted this as a motive by the Biya regime to postpone the parliamentary elections planned in less than two months, others saw it as a welcome move to restore the independence of Southern Cameroons or at least to force the regime to the negotiating table.

Before the attacks, I had heard that a rebel force was being trained, one faction in Njimafor Quarter, two km from where I lived, and another at Alabukam on the road to Mbengwi, the headquarters of Momo, one of the seven divisions in Northwest Province. I did not believe the story until the night of 26 to 27 March 1997. I was seated at a drinking spot with some neighbours quaffing beer in the Cameroonian fashion when I saw them approaching. They wore *danshiki*, a form of jumper with plaited strings at the bottom that is common among the Hausa. They also had white bands wrapped round their heads and wrists with green leaves stuck in them. Armed with bows and arrows, they walked slowly, not obviously conversing or only speaking in whispers.

Their appearance and conduct were so weird that the alcohol I had been consuming vamoosed from my brain and my hair stood on end. The next moment I was asking my legs 'What have I ever eaten without giving you a share?' My legs seemed to understand the plea and conveyed me home more expeditiously than they had ever done before.

I was awakened the next day by gunshots coming from the direction of the Mobile Intervention Unit, popularly known as the GMI. Driven by irrepressible curiosity, I put on jeans and canvas shoes and within five minutes was at the GMI. What I saw took my breath away: Captain A.K Samaki, commander of the gendarmerie brigade (*Brigade Terre*) was lying in a pool of blood.

I was all the more startled by the story that he had been killed by a knife as he had a gun and had been firing at the 'terrorists' in self-defence. The most surprising thing was that the terrorists were not in a hurry to get away but were apparently spoiling for confrontation with uniformed men. Some even came close to the crowd that watched in disbelief and announced that they were fighters for the freedom of Southern Cameroons and that all Southern Cameroonians should join them. What the crowd could not understand was that the GMI police made no effort to arrest them.

The story I later learnt was that the terrorists were those weird-looking men we had seen the previous day. They had gone to the gendarmerie brigade to warn them that all occupation forces in Southern Cameroons should quit. To pre-empt any call for reinforcements, the terrorists began by destroying telephone lines linking the brigade with the Gendarmerie Legion Up Station. Commandant Samaki, on seeing them, attempted exactly what the terrorists knew he would. He picked up the receiver on his table to contact his hierarchy but was informed that the move was not necessary as the lines had already been taken care of. The terrorists, who had earlier been to the Public Security Constabulary and judicial police stations in town warning Francophobes to leave, proceeded to give Commandant Samaki the same message.

After that they left for GMI, passing near the Old Bamenda Fish Pond. On arrival, they saw Commandant Samaki's car, popularly known as 'California'. He had obviously come to warn the GMI police that the terrorists were on their way to confront them. With that singular act, he had signed his own death warrant. The exchange of fire that took place reportedly lasted close to five hours before Commandant Samaki was killed. The captain was reputed to be a relation of Cameroon's first lady, Chantal Biya.

That same day, another gendarme by the name of Fofuleng was killed near the CRTC Bamenda transmitter station Ngwadkan, a few kilometres from the GMI. His killer was surprisingly another gendarme, a

captain by rank who purportedly was attached to the republican guard, the elite presidential security corps, mentioned earlier in connection with the 6 April coup plot. The slain gendarme had obviously identified the captain who in turn thought the secret of his participation in the terrorist plot could only be kept if his fellow gendarme was eliminated.

In Bui Division, another SCNC bedrock, a gendarme was killed in Jakiri by the supposed terrorists, while Justin Mvondo, the DO of Kumbo, and his family were also targeted for elimination. The terrorists set fire to his residence and he only survived thanks to the fact that he and his family took refuge in the bathroom where they turned on the tap and shower. But this was done after one of his sons had been burnt in the fire. He later died having received third-degree burns. Mvondo told his friends and sympathizers that his attackers spoke impeccable French, suggesting that they were Francophones. This revelation lent credence to the allegation that the attack was a glaring case of state-orchestrated terror. This allegation had earlier been confirmed by the Senior Divisional Officer of Khoungbi in the West Province. On the eve of the terrorist attacks, the SDO had convened a security meeting at which he warned his people that there would be violence in a neighbouring province, although he was too cautious to disclose which one. If a top government official knew of such an imminent attack, then why was it not pre-empted, many asked. It also puzzled commentators that a gang of supposed brigands could carry out a hit-and-run attack on three consecutive days in a highly militarized province such as the Northwest Province.

The DO later became a Born Again Christian and published his experiences of that night in Kumbo in a book titled *Saved by God through Fire*. From his testimony and the events that preceded the attacks, the public was left in no doubt that the Biya regime was determined to crush the SCNC and that it was prepared to sacrifice even its most loyal supporters to achieve this. Mvondo's counterpart in Oku, another subdivision in Bui, was luckier in that the terrorists who took him hostage only subjected him to the indignity and displeasure of eating uncooked rice.

Reactions to the events of 27-30 March were many and varied. The first and one of the most memorable reactions coming from Dr Hans Anagho, a retired colonel who had served both the Ahidjo and Biya regimes. He had retired, frowning at the two Francophone regimes for not recognizing his merit as an educated officer with a store of experience in military matters. Colonel Anagho had fought in some of the most famous wars the world had known and could boast being a classmate of many of Africa's military rulers. But because of his Anglophone origins, or perhaps because of his sincerity and outspoken character, several of his students had been promoted over him.

What prompted Anagho to make public his indignation of the Biya regime was a news broadcast on the terrorist attacks by the state-owned media, CRTV. A relay of the event to the mother station by Michael Ndze, CRTV's Bamenda station manager had ended with the correspondent saying he was reporting from the 'war front in Bamenda'.

As a soldier, Anagho had sufficient reason to be irked by what he saw as sensationalist journalism and an unnecessary 'glorification of the commonplace'. He immediately stormed CRTV Bamenda Up station as a guest on 'Crossfire', a popular programme run by the station manager himself. To him, it was as sensational as it was misleading to describe what was taking place as a war. 'Do you know what war is?' Anagho barked at Michael Ndze.

He then proceeded to perform his role as a schoolmaster in the art of warfare by delivering a lecture to Ndze on the topic. In a war situation, he explained, there must be two distinct camps. He cited the case of the Nigerian-Cameroon conflict over the Bakassi Peninsula. 'We could describe that as a war situation. But in the case of the Northwest who is fighting whom?'

Anagho didn't finish there. He castigated the Biya regime for the callous manner in which it was handling military equipment whose purchase he had negotiated. The result was that most of the equipment had since deteriorated and depreciated in value faster than it should have. This was the most devastating statement any individual had ever uttered against the Cameroonian armed forces. A less derogatory remark about the Cameroon military was later to land Haman Mana, the publisher of a daily French language paper, behind bars.

Colonel Anagho's remark sealed the fate of the 'Crossfire' programme. Anagho himself is said to have been quizzed several times by the military hierarchy in Yaoundé. When therefore the SCYL, impressed by his bravado, later honoured him with the flattering appellation 'Southern Cameroon's Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of Southern Cameroons', they were not prepared for Anagho's response in an interview with *The Herald*, a prominent Anglophone newspaper.

'Where is your army?'

The SDF's reaction was quite different. Fru Ndi's party saw in the 'terrorist attacks' a subterfuge by Biya to postpone the 1997 parliamentary elections, which the SDF was poised to win, and resolved not to take the matter lightly. The independent press that at that time was manned by more supporters than reporters took up Fru Ndi's 'battle cry' and placed the whole responsibility for the attack on the Biya regime. Although my showdown with Fru Ndi at his compound on January 21 1996 had cured me of the Ntarikon syndrome, I still saw the terrorist attacks as a

government ploy, much to the chagrin of SCNC activists. One of them, Fomunyo Bah Tang who later committed suicide, obviously due to frustration caused by the delay in achieving Southern Cameroons independence, chided me for supporting Fru Ndi's view. 'Peterkins, I thought you knew better.'

He asked me whether I had so quickly forgotten the interview I granted Ebenezer Akwanga in his presence in which the SCYL chairman maintained that his movement was for the 'argument of force and not the force of argument'. He was reacting to the stories with my by-line in *The Herald* which placed the responsibility for the attack on the shoulders of the Biya regime. I told him that my decision to join those who doubted the SCNC's responsibility was arrived at after the attacks had taken place and the declarations of Justin Mvondo and the fact that I didn't see any clear strategy or pattern of attack emerging. 'You didn't inform me that you intended to launch an attack. The attacks are sporadic and no hint has been given to the public as to what the attackers intend to achieve by their action. This reduces the population to the necessity of only guessing what would happen next. Nobody knows who is at the head of the attackers so that supporters can rally behind him.' To prove that it was not only my position but that of the newspaper, I advised him to fax to my newspaper a copy of the release in which the SCYL claimed responsibility. He did so but it was never published.

The brutality of the regime's gendarmes towards innocent civilians strengthened Fru Ndi's view. Within three days of the attack, a dusk-to-dawn curfew was declared over the whole of the Northwest Province. This was later converted into a state of emergency. Ten innocent people were killed, some shot in cold blood while others were strangled. Mass arrests and torture characterized by extreme brutality were commonplace. As in the state of emergency in 1992, respectable citizens were pulled out of their cars in broad daylight, knocked down or forced to roll in muddy water. Invasion of people's homes, looting and rape followed. People were caught and tortured on flimsy excuses such as the fact that they were tall or big. The logic was that the 25-year-old terrorist who killed Commandant Samaki was himself a big man. Those who managed to leave the gendarmerie's cells after bribing their way out dared not seek treatment at any popular hospital for fear that they might be rearrested on the grounds that those nursing wounds were terrorists whose wounds had been inflicted during confrontation with gendarmes. In short, the Biya regime used the terrorist attacks as justification for an onslaught on the population of the Northwest. There were, however, some pointers to the possibility of the SCYL being involved in the attacks.

The first is the fact that a week before the attacks, SCYL leader

Akwanga Ebenezer had actually left the Southwest Province and pitched tents in the Northwest. He held a meeting with supporters at which he placed on the tables ten pistols, telling them that it was time out for speeches, press releases and resolutions. The public security police stormed one of the meetings after a tip-off and there was open confrontation with SCYL members. No arrests were made, partly because the commissioner who commanded the operation knew the justness of the Anglophone struggle.

Akwanga was arrested alongside Julius Ngu Ndi, a physics student at the University of Dschang in the Western Province. The story was that they went to steal explosive material from the headquarters of RAZEL, a French road construction company carrying out repair work on the Jakiri-Kumbo road. Details of how he was tortured are contained in Akwanga's autobiographical work *Smiling through Hardship*. There were also fantastic stories about the terrorists' training recounted by persons who claimed to have visited the training grounds. One such story was recounted to his neighbours and acquaintances by somebody who claimed to have undergone the training.

According to the story narrated by one of the terrorists who was a teacher in one of the numerous nursery (kindergarten) schools in town, he took part in the training. When it was drawing to an end all of them were told to each bring a black fowl to complete the fortification process. The fowl was intended to make them invisible or to be the colour of darkness so they could pass the enemy unnoticed. The terrorists were also made bullet-proof, which explained why Commandant Samaki fired several times but did not succeed in killing the person who finally stabbed him to death with a knife. He did not have enough money for a black fowl but was determined to be part of the military offensive. He was wounded in the confrontation at GMI and was admitted to Bamenda General Hospital. His colleagues later took him away but somehow the gendarmes finally got him, subjected him to inhumane torture and finally got out of him most of the secrets about the training, including the names of those who took part in it.

Another story linking the SCYL to the 1997 terrorist attacks was recounted to me by a former classmate at the University of Yaoundé. He said he was driving to Bamenda one evening when he met a group of 13 youths, some as young as 16. They stopped his car and requested a lift to town, which he gave them. His car was a Bashie and could carry most of them. Two of them joined him in the front seat. As he drove to town, the car's owner asked them why they were dressed as they were (as described earlier). They said they were freedom fighters and their mission was to liberate their nation, Southern Cameroons. He asked them how they hoped to overcome a well-armed regime like Biya's, which had made itself

even more formidable by signing military accords with great nations like France. The youth replied that they had a bigger army than he could see. Their real army, they said was God. My friend concluded by telling me that when he was returning to Bafut the following day, gendarmes stopped his car, accused him of transporting terrorists and forced him to drive to the Northwest Gendarmerie Legion. There he put up a spirited defence, arguing that he did it for fear of his life. That was the first time he saw the terrorists and did not know their destination. His car was impounded for three weeks and he only collected it after 'behaving himself' like any true Cameroonian.

It is noteworthy that the gendarmes later descended with incomparable brutality on the Bafut population, killing a young man who knew nothing about the attacks. The late Patrick Feryu, a gendarme friend, boasted to me 'We taught the terrorists an unforgettable lesson'.

The conclusion I can draw from the story of the 'terrorist attacks' is that Akwanga and his collaborators actually planned to do something dramatic to convince the Biya regime that military action could be used to solve the Anglophone problem in Cameroon. The idea was only to sound a warning note to the regime, not to kill anybody. The government got wind of it and infiltrated the ranks of the SCYL and took part in the training. To justify a crackdown on Southern Cameroons activists, the government agents went against the original objective of the SCYL by killing gendarmes. This gave the government the excuse it needed to crack down on Southern Cameroonian activists. It is worth noting that apart from Akwanga, most of those who were later arrested, killed, or tried by the Yaoundé military tribunal were innocent people. In fact, the regime could not produce a single piece of evidence to show that they were terrorists. The arrests were in accordance with the French way of thinking; that once a crime has been committed someone must be arrested for it whether they committed the act or not. All those in the place where it took place are automatically declared guilty and so deserve torture or death even before the trial begins.

A similar incident took place in Bamenda three years latter. Alkali Garouaa, the GMI police commissioner commandant was killed as he emerged from his girlfriend's house. Pierre Minlo Medjo, then a delegate of national security ordered that the culprits be arrested within 72 hours. The police had to arrest people to prevent the wrath of their boss descending upon them. They logically went for criminals they knew and even collaborated with. Caroline Lambiv, the commissioner's girlfriend, was the number one suspect as a woman who might want to eliminate her lover for whatever reason. All she had to do was to lure him to her own doorstep where she had assassins waiting to do the job. How very simple. So it was with SCNC activists, ten of whom died before the trial, some

after being arrested, others later in detention.



State Persecutors

The trials of scores of persons accused by the Biya regime of masterminding the 1997 terrorist attacks in the Northwest Province constitutes one of the greatest travesties of justice in mankind's legal history. The detainees who were arrested under controversial circumstances, some on their farms and others in their homes or places of business, were subjected to unimaginable indignities as they later revealed before being incarcerated in the dreaded Kondengui Maximum Security Prison in Yaoundé. They first appeared in court in April 1999, two years after their arrest but hearings effectively began on 25 June at the Yaoundé Military Tribunal.

As recounted by *The Post*, the court session kicked off with an embarrassing announcement: that Patrick Yimbu, one of the detainees had died that morning. Consternation and wailing seized the court room but the presiding judge, Engoula Manga, went ahead as if it was the death of a dog or some other animal and not that of a human being that had been announced.

What was even more shocking was the discovery by the detainees and lawyers that the charges against the suspects had been changed. Initially, they were charged with attempted secession. Instead, the judge announced arson, murder, theft and the illegal possession of firearms. The case of Philip Tete was glaring. When he first appeared in court in April he was accused of presiding over an SCNC meeting. This time he was simply accused of threatening life. The defence lawyers, Joseph Mbah Ndam, Charles Taku, Francis Sama and Pius Nfor Njobarah, ran amok when the judge announced that all the arguments and objections from the defence should fall within the context of the charges and nothing else. But the defence argued that the evidence before them was for the charges of secession, including two items of correspondences from S.T. Muna and John Ngu Foncha, Southern Cameroons elderly statesmen, both of them now dead. Following the dropping of the secession charges, they did not know how to proceed with the case.

The judge was unmoved by the argument. 'I don't want to hear about Anglophones or anything political in this matter,' he warned.

Etienne Abondo Ze Vina, commissioner to the government, corroborated with the presiding judge by accusing the defence of trying to impose the charge of secession on the court in order to benefit from delaying tactics. The defence then complained that they had not been served with a copy of the charges. The matter was adjourned until 13 July 1999.

Present in court that day was Albert Womah Mukong, a renowned human rights activist and crusader for Anglophone freedom, who is now dead. Also present was Fon Samuel Ngum, a pastor by training who later became a traditional ruler and then a lackey of the Biya regime and a persecutor of his people. He was in court to act as a prosecution witness. The 57 detainees present were as thin as rakes and Ebenezer Akwanga could only walk using a walking stick. Even worse was Pa Zachariah Khan, a 65-year-old man whose toes had all been cut off during torture.

But a crucial phase of the court was that which held on 27 July. During that session, there were eleven human rights lawyers to defend the detainees. The counsel was unanimous that gendarmes who had investigated the matter had done a very shoddy job and what they had as evidence were concocted bits of information put together with the intention of ensuring the unfair nailing of the detainees. As the presiding judge read out what he claimed were confessions from the detainees, they all shouted out in protest.

But the judge and the military state prosecutor, Etienne Abondo, maintained that the report of the gendarmes was objective and accurate. Pius Njobarah, one of the defence lawyers, could not hide his disgust at what he saw as blatant lies. 'Mr President,' he bellowed, addressing the presiding judge, 'if you take what the gendarmes wrote during preliminary investigations as conclusive evidence, then just go ahead and condemn these people without pretending to judge them.' The lawyer went ahead and accused the court of trying to legalize the murder of innocent people, meaning the detainees, adding that such an act pointed to the fact that the whole judicial system was under trial at the military tribunal. A Francophone defence lawyer present declared that the detainees were innocent until more evidence was presented to adorn the claims of the gendarmes. Some of the detainees who were arraigned contradicted the reports of the gendarmes. Thomas Kingze, accused of participating in the killing of the gendarme Raphael Makoke at Jakiri said he was arrested for simply belonging to the SCNC and the SDF. The 78-year-old John Lukong and Ngeh Sama said they were arrested on allegations of supporting the SCNC.

Other detainees were accused of attempting to blow up the bridge between the Northwest and West Provinces. An interesting

testimony came from Simon Ngegh who was accused of taking hostage the DO Andre Kamdem who later died. He admitted that the DO was held hostage in his house but denied taking part in the act. He, interestingly, said he was arrested by a group of people who accused him of taking money from President Biya to frustrate the Southern Cameroons struggle.

Madeilein Kamdem, the widow of Andre Kamdem, countered Ngegh's story quoting him as telling her during the incident 'Your husband will die Biya's death', while his colleague shouted 'Southern Cameroons independence Oye' on the night of 27 March when the attack took place. Anderbert Ngegh, Simon Ngegh's son and also a detainee, told the court that he was in school when the incident took place, yet he was arrested, detained under unhealthy circumstances and forced to have sex with a female detainee. The same gendarme, he said, killed another detainee by strangling him.

Fon Ngum contradicted himself, while providing testimony about one of his subjects, Pa Salifou. He first described Pa Salifou as being innocent and when the detainee accused him of lies, he retracted his statement. The defence lawyers described Fon Ngum as 'the most incredible witness in court'. The trial took another dramatic turn when two Anglophone gendarmes were arraigned for allegedly taking part in the attacks. Major George Nyoh and Samuel Elloh Egbe were accused of taking part in attacks in Oku, Bui Division during which DO Kamdem was held hostage and the gendarmerie brigade set on fire. Ellah Egbe told the court that he was on guard alone at the gendarmerie when the masked terrorists arrive. He said they forced the door open and came in and caught him after he had exhausted his bullets in the process of firing into the air to scare them. Quizzed by the state prosecutor on why he did not shoot to kill, he said there was no light in the brigade headquarters. He, however, managed to sneak out through the window just before the terrorists threw in a bottle containing petrol, setting the brigade ablaze.

The court president accused both gendarmes of complicity on the grounds that they had discussed matters in a friendly manner with detainees. The verdict of the trial, which was delivered on 5 October 1999, was as controversial as the trial itself. It was delivered late at night. Its highlights included life sentences for four persons, among them Simon Ngegh whose trial alongside that of his son raised a lot of questions. Ebenezar Akwanga and three others were sentenced to 20 years imprisonment each. Samuel Ngegh, Simon Ngegh's son, went down for 15 alongside Pa Zachariah Khan whose toes were all cut within his first month in detention. Philip Tete and seven others were sentenced to 10 years each. He later died without serving his full term. Three persons went down for eight years each, while David Langhi who also attracted a

lot of attention during the hearing was sentenced to two years, but since all of them had already been in detention for two years, they were set free. 27 people, among them the two gendarmes Paul Nyoh and Samuel Ellah Ebue, were discharged and acquitted. The judgment was highly criticized by all the defence lawyers and particularly by the late Albert Mukong, who openly attacked the French saying it was their backing that gave the Biya regime the courage they had to maltreat Anglophones.

Mbah Ndam later appealed but the Mfoundi Appeal Court went no further than reducing the life terms of some. For instance, Simon Ngek and three others who were sentenced to life imprisonment had to serve 25 years each, after the ruling passed by Justice Christophe Yossa, the Appeal Court's presiding judge.

It should be noted that at least eleven of the detainees had died in detention. Surprisingly, the Yaoundé military tribunal behaved as if they were still alive and apparently expected applause for what they believed was a fair judgment. The appeal, which was heard on 15 December 2005, had all the trappings of a complete retrial, with the prosecution saying all the accused should face a firing squad. Barrister Duga Titanji, an international human rights lawyer, led the defence and accused the prosecution of sentencing innocent people on the basis of hearsay evidence. The lawyer urged the presiding judge to imitate renowned judges, like Bea Abednego, who freed SCNC detainees and Justices Richard Fombe and others who freed 172 SDF detainees in Bamenda following the dictates of their consciences, and who were still promoted later. The failure of the appeal court to heed this advice demands the description of the ruling as a mockery of justice by both the prisoners and their lawyers. The matter is said to have been sent to the Supreme Court which, in characteristic style, has since been 'sitting on it'.

Some of the prisoners have since been transferred to Bamenda Central Prison. It is worth noting that Ebenezer Akwanga, the most vocal of the SCNC prisoners who was sentenced to 20 years in prison, later escaped under circumstances that to this date remain unclear. The only bit of information about his escape is contained in his autobiography *Smiling through Hardship*. Going by his own account, he was rescued by 'Delta Force'. The Anglophone public is yet to know what or who 'Delta Force' is.



Released Terror Suspects Narrate Harrowing Tales

Some of the suspected terrorists incarcerated at the Kondengui and Mfou prisons and later released after trial, arrived in Bamenda at midday on Wednesday 13 October 1999. Shouts of joy and jubilation tore the air at the office of the Bamenda-based Human Rights Defence Group, where the general public had gathered to see the freed detainees from Kondengui and Mfou prisons in Yaounde. But as the euphoria died down, all the detainees recounted the horrors they had been through, their experiences from the time of their arrest, through their detention to their trial and their final release from jail. Their experiences were identical.

At gunpoint, they were forced to rape women in jail, says Njobara Hycinth: 'I was ordered to walk on broken bottles, and was forced to rape a woman in front of the gendarmes. I did it to save my life. I must apologize because this was a married lady. It happened in Oku and Kumbo where we were detained.' He added: 'Other detainees were forced to do the same, and also to perform acts of homosexuality, a thing we had never known or thought of doing.'

Hycinth Njobara, 34, was a lecturer at GSS Elak-Oku before his arrest. He recalled that a gendarme officer, fondly called Platini, squeezed the neck of one detainee, Konseh Emmanuel, who died as he was being transported to Bamenda. Asked where Konseh's corpse was disposed of, Njobara said; 'I don't know what happened to the corpse because we were handed to the gendarmes in BMM Bamenda and they left with Konseh's remains.'

He said he was not physically tortured in Yaoundé but that they were regularly showered with provocative insults and statements such as 'Biafrans', 'foreigners', 'destructive elements' and 'Fru Ndi's mercenaries who must be executed'. He regretted the deaths of Ngwa Richard, Fai Lawrence and Patrick Yembuin. 'While in detention, we were cross-examined by a state prosecutor with the help of an interpreter, whose broken English was misleading as statements on both sides tended to mean something else,' he noted. Asked whether after being brandished a

SCNC sympathizer, detained and tortured, he would ever lend his support to the group again, Njobara was categorical that the SCNC cause was just and blamed the government for shying away from it and shifting the initial political charges of secessionist tendencies to common law crimes of theft, murder and arson.

Narrating her experiences during detention, Miss Prisca Fonyam, a nurse by profession, said she was 'beaten and starved in the Mbengwi detention cell'. 'Up at the Bamenda gendarmerie station, my menstruation began. I had a ceaseless flow for days and I had only one pair of panties. Since I was locked up in a room with several men, there was nothing I could do, I couldn't even remove the panties and drain the blood before putting them back on. Worse still, the cell was infested with lice. We were whisked off to Yaoundé after three months; it was hell at Upstation in Bamenda.' But Miss Prisca, a single mother of two, was lucky to have been spared the ordeal of rape, 'because I considered all the detainees as my brothers'. She was also lucky because her salary was not suspended.

Another detainee, HRH Fon Peter Fonyam, a retired army officer, recounted how his palace in Kobenyang Village, Mbengwi, was ransacked. He said he was arrested on charges of destruction of voters' registers and accused of propagating the SCNC doctrine. He said the torture he received was unbearable.

Paul Nchaw, 38, a civil servant at the Divisional Leprosy Control, Mbengwi, narrated how a gendarme officer, Achirimbi Neba, forced 43 detainees into a detention room of 2 m². Nchaw said within 20 minutes all the detainees had collapsed and before the door was flung open, two went into comma due to a lack of oxygen.

Vitalis Lukong, 50, a father of eight children, complained of fractured ribs. He said that he was not given any medical attention. While in prison, thieves broke into his house and stole his coffee and household equipment. *The Post* was told.

Felix Lawsamba Fon, 42, from Nkor-Noni in Bui Division had a bitter experience. A father of seven children, Lawsamba is almost blind. He was chained up at the gendarmerie de Lac in Yaoundé, from where they were transported to Mfou Prison. He has been economically, physically and psychologically ruined.

Pa Joseph Ndifon, 60, from Oku had a broken leg as a result of torture. A teacher with CBC Elak-Oku, Ndifon says he lost his salary. He explained that he became helpless and had ten children to feed.

Another old man, Pa Salifou Buwai Tanko, 62, a Muslim who is married to three wives, experienced severe torture at Upstation, Bamenda, before being transferred to the Kondengui. He is a butcher but says he is not sure he will achieve anything on earth again before his last day comes. Pa says he was never tortured in Yaoundé but 'was seriously tortured in

Oku, Kumbo and Bamenda'. He has 35 children.

Addressing the detainees and the crowd that turned up to welcome the detainees, Human rights activist Albert Womah Mukong regretted that the detainees were abandoned and called on the international community to intervene. He assured them that their plight would be brought to the attention of the UN. He equally expressed regret over the country's brain-drain as most Cameroonians are now scared of living in their own country. 'If you have gone through such torture, tell me whether you will still dream of staying in this country.'

Albert Mukong went on an aggressive campaign around Bamenda Town asking people to donate money so that the released detainees could get to their villages. In turn, the released detainees lauded the efforts of Albert Mukong not only for the consoling lecture he gave but also for the funds he raised to enable them to return home.

Matyrdom for Fru Ndi

The personality cult surrounding Fru Ndi also appeared in the Kondengui SCNC detainees' case. Some of those arrested rejected what they described as a ploy to incriminate the SDF chairman. This disclosure was made by one of the Kondengui detainees suspected of orchestrating terrorist attacks in the Northwest Province in 1997. David Langhi, 37, said gendarmes tried to implicate Fru Ndi and the SDF chairman, Ni John Fru Ndi.

David Langhi, who was tried and acquitted with other Anglophone detainees by the Yaoundé military tribunal, told the story of his arrest and detention to *The Post* soon after his acquittal by the tribunal. 'While in detention in a dark underground cell at the gendarmerie brigade Du Lac in Yaoundé, we were told that we would be free if we accepted being taken to a forest in the east dressed up in military uniforms to confess that we were Fru Ndi's army of rebels.' Langhi revealed. 'I told the gendarmes that we couldn't do such a thing. They told us that that was the only opportunity by which we could be freed.' According to Langhi, torture of the detainees intensified after their refusal to link the opposition chieftain to terrorist acts. After gaining his freedom, an audacious Langhi said he would sue the government for damages for what he described as his 'arbitrary arrest and detention'. Langhi rumbled with anger when he singled out a gendarmerie officer in Nkambe for being the brain behind his arrest. Langhi was arrested for keeping a wanted lady (Grace Yaya) and said he was ordered to pay FCFA 20,000 to secure his release. He had no money and was forced to sign three blank sheets on which the gendarmes later wrote incriminating statements which they attributed to him. He was taken to the dreaded BMM cells where he met 35 other detainees. Langhi described gendarmerie cells as

hell on earth and said that as soon as he got there the gendarmes stripped them all naked, seized their money and set their clothes on fire. After this, they chained the detainees up.

‘We were beaten with a certain truncheon which the gendarmes called *baton blende*.’ After that, he said, they were ordered to run clockwise and anti-clockwise. ‘Next, they ordered us to lie on our backs facing the sun for two hours with our eyes open. They burnt plastic papers and dropped the hot liquid on our backs, warning that the exercise would be repeated on whoever dared to cry. They did this to us daily. Pa Zacariah who the Yaoundé military court sentenced to 15 years in jail was suspended and tortured on the dreaded torture machine known in French as the *balancoire*. The gendarmes also cut off all his toes using a lance. The gendarmes burnt the travel bags of Ebenezer Akwanga and Julius Ngu Ndi and forced them to inhale the smoke. As a result, Ngu Ndi became half-blind and remained so until he later died. The women, he continued, were no better treated. The torture meted out on the women, he said, precipitated their menstrual cycles. ‘We had to run around to look for pieces of papers or soft material we could get for them to use. In Bamenda we went for three weeks without food. Anybody who brought us food was beaten and sent away.’ He also recounted how all 36 detainees survived on banana peels and a litre of water every three days. Their departure for Yaoundé was even more frightening than their stay in Bamenda. Langhi said the detainees, all bound with chains, were thrown into military trucks after the lights had all been put out.

Three days after their arrival in Yaoundé, a gendarme came and told them to prepare their wills because they were going to be killed. To pre-empt such a tragic end, he said the detainees wrote a letter to the UN representative in Yaoundé who soon informed the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms. Its chairman, Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei, soon visited them.

At Kondengui where they were then taken, he said the detainees were refused vaccinations against tuberculosis and other contagious diseases simply because they were Anglophones. ‘In Kondengui the food situation was horrible. We lived on three tablespoons of corn chaff a day. We had to go on hunger strike when we saw maggots in our food. Richard Ngwa, one of our colleagues in detention, died due to the poor detention conditions and neglect.

The ex-detainee, who had been separated from his wife and three children for three years, was glad that he would see them again. He was particularly grateful to the Catholic, Baptist and Presbyterian churches for the assistance they gave them while they were in detention. The British High Commission, as well as the Spanish and German embassies also assisted the detainees with food and medicines while they were in

detention. But we seem to have almost forgotten the troubles of the SDF in our preoccupation with the SCNC.



Electoral Gymnastics & the Military Option

Of all the natural features on the earth's landscape, a river is, to me, the most fascinating. I developed an immeasurable interest in rivers while at secondary school when our geography teacher taught us the life cycle of a river which, he said, has three stages in its development: a youthful stage, a mature stage and old age. In its youthful stage, also called the torrent stage, it moves with considerable force cutting through interlocking spurs. In the mature stage, the river flows through a smooth valley, having eliminated most of the obstacles in its way. In old age, it begins to meander again, forming oxbow lakes in the process.

The life of a human being follows a similar pattern. In his prime (feminists must forgive me for the use of the masculine gender pronoun), the human being is full of youthful exuberance with enough energy to face and overcome obstacles. In middle age, his youthful passions are under control and he can be considered mature. And in old age he becomes senile, sometimes inconsistent and even childlike, needing the assistance of his child(ren) to walk, eat or make decisions. That is why William Wordsworth says 'the child is the father of the man'.

The Social Democratic Front, the party whose activities occupied centre stage in Cameroonian politics, was in its mature stage until 1996. In 1997 the characteristics of old age began to manifest themselves. The river (to conclude the analogy) is like truth. A river flows continuously through man's irresponsible environmental activities. When the truth begins to come out, the revelation is non-stop until it ends. That is what began to happen to the SDF from 1996.

In 1996, the SDF participated in municipal elections and won 62 councils, including half of all the major city councils. But the Biya regime appointed government delegates over the councils, which led to rioting in Bamenda, Kumba and Limbe. In Limbe, five persons were shot dead, including a soldier who was reportedly killed by his colleague for shooting dead an unarmed civilian. The protests produced no tangible results as the Biya regime maintained its government delegates.

Contrary to SDF predictions when the terrorist attacks took

place, the 1997 legislative elections were not postponed. The Biya regime need not have done that, after all, it drew up the electoral calendar and made it public. The CPDM and SDF contested all 180 seats and voting, which took place on 17 May 1997, went off smoothly. But even before the counting began, the regime reintroduced its 1992 trick. Kontchou, the New Deal's Geobels, began reading out the predicted results, known in French as *tendances*, a tactful way of preparing the public's mind for CPDM. In a CRTV interview broadcast at 7 pm, the communications minister announced that the ruling party was leading by 116 seats and that the final results would be no different.

The SDF went haywire and declared that it had more than 100 seats. But what Kontchou had declared, he had declared. The SDF was given 43 seats/ The Supreme Court cancelled results in a few areas but when the reruns finally took place the ruling party had the exact 116 seats the minister of communication had predicted. 'Democratie Avancee', a form of democracy whereby results of elections are arranged in advance, had triumphed.

The final results put the SDF in a fix whether to enter Parliament or boycott it and continue on the streets. Little did the party know that its most malevolent enemy, or rather the enemy of democracy, was within the party itself. These were the majority of the 43 MPs-elect who argued that they spent fabulous sums of money during election campaigns and were determined to have it back whether the party liked it or no. So it was no longer a question of bringing change to Cameroon but a question of change in lifestyle for the chosen few.

The debate that took place during an NEC meeting held in Fru Ndi's building along Bamenda Commercial Avenue lasted almost the whole day. The Biya regime was also monitoring events in the SDF. The regime was still suffering from the devastating effects of the Ghost Town Operation which had brought the economy to its knees and could not bear the thought of the SDF going back onto the streets. When therefore it saw the country's major opposition party unable to make up its mind on the issue of entering Parliament, the regime decided to make it up for the party. It sent in two military jet fighters which flew at close range over the building where the deliberations were taking place. This was an unequivocal message to Fru Ndi and Co. that failing to enter Parliament was an indication that the SDF wanted war and should be ready for it. The experiment produced the desired results. The NEC meeting came to an abrupt halt with Fru Ndi announcing a press conference in Yaoundé to declare whether the SDF would enter Parliament or not. The results of the press conference, which took place a few days later, were predictable: the SDF decided to enter Parliament and form another front there to fight for change. Fru Ndi also promised that the 43 SDF MPs would

cause an ‘earthquake’ in the Assembly.

The SDF’s decision to enter Parliament was received with different degrees of emotion: with ecstasy by the MPs-elect and their family members and (girl)friends, with mixed feelings by the press and political analysts, and outright anger by extremists who saw in them an inclination to satisfy personal desires. The MPs-elect were seen by the radicals as a group of self-seeking individuals whose preoccupation was their personal aggrandisement at the expense of democratic change. The MPs-elect, many of whom had openly joined the party only a year before, were seen as political opportunists who had taken advantage of their financial prowess to hijack Perestroika and drive it in their own direction and at their own momentum.

It should, however, be said in fairness to Fru Ndi that he was genuinely opposed to the idea of his party entering Parliament, having bought the suggestion in a series of editorials in *The Herald* that advised the SDF to stay out of Parliament as the only means of sustaining the revolution it had started in 1990.

The SDF’s chairman feared that rejecting the argument of taking up seats in Parliament would split the party as the MPs-elect were to be validated whether their party liked it or not. The law was in their favour because once elected an MP is a parliamentarian for the whole nation. Fru Ndi’s error lay in the fact that he yielded to blackmail by allowing himself to be intimidated by the SDF MPs who were clearly in confederacy with the Biya regime. Proof of this is that the first move they made in Parliament was the election of Cavaye Yeguie Djibril, a CPDM MP as assembly speaker. Their argument was that they needed CPDM support to get posts in the Assembly bureau. Joseph Mbah Ndam, SDF the parliamentary group leader, made things worse by insulting the UNDP, which had had up to 68 seats in the previous parliament as a result of the SDF having boycotted the elections. When the NUDP MPs protested against the SDF’s move, Mbah Ndam told them to go and lick their wounds.

News of what the SDF had done was received with indignation by the rest of the nation. *Le Messager*, the leading French language newspaper at the time made mincemeat out of the SDF MPs in a headline in which they were portrayed as Iscariots. Fru Ndi himself was scandalized and joined the press in acknowledging that the ‘earthquake’ the SDF went to cause in Parliament was anything but, voting alongside the CPDM. Most of the criticism levelled against these MP was that they were less preoccupied with their party and militants than with their stomachs and the welfare of family members and concubines. One newspaper, *Chronicle*, even joked that the real earthquake they were causing was between the thighs of wives and concubines.

Added to this was the information that those in the Assembly bureaux had joined the bandwagon of corruption and were excelling in the intrigues that enabled them to get contracts for themselves and progeny. So much did SDF bureau members compromise their stand that Assembly Speaker Cavaye Yeguie Djibril was more comfortable with them than with MPs of his own CPDM party. When therefore Mbah Ndam and colleagues staged a walkout, as they often did when the Assembly was to pass an anti-people law or vote an unrealistic budget, the majority of the CPDM MPs treated them with the same scorn as a rich and proud husband who knows that his runaway wife will come back since she cannot afford to do without the goodies with which his house abounds. Among those who treated the SDF boycotters with scorn and derision was SCNC vice chairman, Nfo Ngala Nfor. In a press statement issued after one of his diplomatic offensives abroad, Nfor Nfor mocked them for not copying the Southern Cameroonian politicians who walked out of the Eastern House of Assembly in Nigeria in 1953 staying away permanently with a view to undertaking a more meaningful political move.

Worse than the parliamentary buffoonery was the attitude of SDF MPs towards the development of their constituencies. Most of them did not distinguish between their parliamentary pay and the FCFA 8 million given them as funds to carry out development projects in their constituencies, which also contained militants from other political parties. A majority of them also became absentee MPs who took up almost permanent residence in Yaoundé, Douala or Bamenda, far from what they considered an over-dependent madding crowd at home.

Fru Ndi himself was disgruntled with the MPs. His bone of contention was that many of them hardly attended sessions, others spent time abroad and the majority were indifferent to party activities, including NEC meetings. His grievances were contained in a letter dated 11 August 1998. The extra-parliamentary SDF was moving from one political blunder to another. The SDF found itself in a logjam when the Biya regime announced the October 1997 presidential elections. The rules of the game as the SDF made the public understand it were crafted in a manner as to make victory for the party's candidate impossible. The SDF therefore resolved not to be part of what it termed a 'charade'.

This seemed to be exactly what the Biya regime had wanted the SDF to do. Memories of 1992 were still fresh and, worse still, Fru Ndi had continued to describe Biya as an 'illegal head of state'. The incumbent wanted legitimacy at all costs. He knew that with the economic advantage offered, all the political clowns, even the scum of the earth would put forward their candidature. He would allow the polls to be free, fair and transparent and would justify his victory by saying several opposition

candidates stood as competition. That was what happened. The cat (SDF) being away, more than half a dozen (8) political 'rodents' announced their intention to run as presidential candidates. These included the likes of Albert Dzongang, Hogbe Nlend and six other little-known political upstarts, none of whom had ever won a council or parliamentary seat in a constituency before. The results were predictable: 92% voted for the incumbent. This was not a very different percentage from the 99.99% of the Ahidjo years. The main difference here was that Biya's 92% was won in a multiparty era when Cameroon boasted over 200 political parties. Ahidjo's Cameroon National Union Party, the CNU, left nobody in any doubt that its priority was unity and not democracy. That possibly explains why the word 'democracy' was completely left out of its appellation.

Military Option

There was apprehension that the results of the 1997 elections, apparently obtained from free, fair and transparent polls, were not convincing because the major opposition parties like the SDF, the CDU and the UDP had boycotted the elections. Had the opposition organized street demonstrations or any other form of protest at home, the Biya regime, although always jittery, would have been a little bit more at ease. Failing to act at all would have been a source of disquiet because when human beings are doing nothing, they are making mischief. What jolted the regime was the diplomatic move the SDF made. Fru Ndi, accompanied by close aides, undertook a tour of West African states in which he complained to the heads of state or their representatives about how Biya had set the stage for civil war in Cameroon. The regime was particularly frightened by the information that the Fru Ndi-led delegation got in touch with and won the sympathy of the enigmatic Sani Abacha, Nigeria's head of state whose hatred of Biya manifested itself through the invasion of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula. Abacha, a military dictator, was unpopular at home and in the manner of all such rulers, knew he could divert the attention of his subjects by undertaking successful ventures abroad. He had wholeheartedly supported the joint military ventures of the combined West African force, ECOMOG in Sierra Leone and from his actions and declarations left nobody in doubt that he was ready to support a military offensive against the Biya regime. It was rumoured that Abacha was giving financial assistance to the Fru Ndi-led delegation, although the amount is still a matter of conjecture.

According to *Chronicle* and SDF inside sources, Fru Ndi first sent Seidou Maidadi, the SDF national vice chairman and other top party officials to negotiate with Captain Guerandi Mbara, whose escape after the failed 6 April 1984 coup remains a mystery. The Maidadi-led

delegation reportedly met Guerandi in Chad. The Fru Ndi-led delegation was to meet Sani Abacha and negotiate an arms deal as well as the provision of a corridor or escape route in the event of failure. Abacha's spokesman, who the delegation met, said the person to discuss with the Nigerian head of state should be an expert in military affairs. In other words, he had to know what type of arms to request. Fru Ndi, as usual, opted to meet Abacha, although he was no military expert.

It did not take long for Abacha to discover that Fru Ndi was not only ignorant of military matters but really did not want war. SDF insiders who narrated the story to me said that throughout his discussion with Abacha, Fru Ndi was interested in nothing but money. Abacha reportedly gave him a reasonable sum.

After returning home, Fru Ndi and close aides agreed on what to do to provoke a situation that could lead to war. The least a man who has economic investments can desire is war and Fru Ndi, though he gives the impression of being a poor man, is in fact the opposite. Nonetheless, to give the impression that he adhered to the original plan, it was agreed that the 11 October 1997 presidential elections should be disrupted. A few thugs were also to create some disorder in Yaoundé.

The Yaoundé *agents provocateur* actually started rioting in Obala on the outskirts of Yaoundé. When they were arrested and tortured, they said they were acting on Fru Ndi's instructions. Yaoundé authorities are said to have instructed General Atenga Nkoa, then commander of the Sixth Military Region which comprises the Northwest and West Provinces to summon Fru Ndi and force him to sign an undertaking that his party would not jeopardize peace in the Northwest or in the whole nation. This Fru Ndi readily did. The notorious peace pact signed in 2002 is, according to my informant, the result of a reminder by the Northwest governor of Fru Ndi's undertaking of 1997. So when Fru Ndi said the SDF would never bring war to Cameroon we should do him the singular honour of taking him at his word. He is now so at ease with the Biya regime, or the regime is so comfortable with him that at a press conference in Yaoundé recently he refused to promise Cameroonians that the SDF would champion the campaign to stop Biya from manipulating the constitution to make Biya president for life.

With Fru Ndi's complacency, the Biya regime is no longer frightened by the prospect of another Kabila, or in the case of Cameroon, a Guerandi-led invasion of the country from the north as Guerandi Mbara was at that time resident in Burkina Faso. Laurent Kabila had taught Africa's opposition how to get rid of stubborn dictators by leading a rebel group to oust the Congolese dictator, Mobutu Sesesekou and Biya hated him passionately for that. The fear generated by the news in 1997 caused the deployment of combat-ready troops to the north. Security

forces had also been dispatched to trail Fru Ndi abroad and the information it got from these security operatives was anything but comforting.

The international community was not indifferent to the rumours and the US and France in particular were very concerned. In fact, in this period there was a lot of espionage, with press reports announcing the presence of French and US warships off the coast of Douala one after the other. With such disquieting information, the Biya regime saw no better option than to initiate dialogue with the SDF.

On 14 December 1997, the CPDM met and signed an accord to work towards an understanding. The CPDM delegation was led by Peter Mafany Musonge and assisted by Joseph Charles Doumba, while that of the SDF was headed by Retired Justice Nyo Wakai accompanied by the SDF Secretary General Tazoacha Asonganyi. The two parties arrived at the accord after each had exchanged proposals on what to do to move the democratic process forward. The CPDM was reported to be interested in the idea of a union government but the SDF's position was that an independent body be created to handle elections from the registration of voters to proclamations of election results. Such a position was anything but palatable to the ruling party. Biya made known his dissatisfaction with the SDF's proposal by inviting the UNDP's leader, Bouba Bello Maigari, to join a CPDM government, bait that Bello swallowed with uncommon gusto and appetite. Fru Ndi had hoped to pre-empt such a move by attending the UNDP congress and making Bouba promise never to betray the opposition. Bello had known, even before former PM Achidi Achu made the pronouncement, that politics was a game of interest. In persuading him to make the pledge, the SDF chairman had forgotten that his parliamentary group leader had told Bello and fellow UNDP MP only seven months before when they wanted consensual action at the Assembly to go and lick their wounds. Fru Ndi seemed oblivious of the fact that in 1992 after the two parties had filed petitions at the Supreme Court for the cancellation of the presidential elections that the SDF had withdrawn its own after CPDM agents had tricked Fru Ndi into believing that the final results would be in his favour. That was why Bello said he accepted Biya's victory 'for the sake of peace', leaving the SDF alone to cry 'stolen victory'. The UNDP had finally got the opportunity it needed to tell the SDF to 'go to blazes'.

It is worth noting that Fru Ndi had earlier disappointed the radicals in Cameroon as far back as 1993. The story goes that Djeukam Tchameni, leader of *Carpe Liberté*, had fled the country following information that there were plans to arrest and, if possible, eliminate him. He was a diehard supporter of Fru Ndi in the campaign for the recovery of the stolen victory of 1992.

While in Burkina Faso, he succeeded in persuading Blaise Campaore, although another dictator, to support the opposition. Campaore was and still remains a close friend of Guerandi Mbara from the April 1984 'coup fame'. Campaore and Guerandi both persuaded Ghana's Jerry Rawlings and Libyan leader Mouamar Ghadafi to come to the assistance of Cameroonians groaning under the yoke of the Biya regime. The compliance of Fru Ndi was needed to finalize the war plan. Unfortunately, Tchameni could not return to Cameroon for reasons discussed above.

Fortunately for him though, Fru Ndi went to Clinton's inauguration on 20 January 1993. Tchameni learnt of it and travelled to the US where he met the SDF chairman. He expected Fru Ndi to jump at the opportunity, given that the Americans had confirmed his victory over Biya in the 1992 presidential elections. The fact that the majority of Cameroonians supported the SDF and were ready to do battle with the regime was another point in Fru Ndi's favour. But to the disappointment of the human rights activist, Fru Ndi told him he was a believer in Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom were advocates of peaceful change.

Fru Ndi equally embarrassed Tchameni by trying to find out how much money was available for such a venture. Judging from what transpired later in 1997, it is reasonable to conclude that if money had been given to Fru Ndi for the implementation of the military option, he would have pocketed it. It is believed that the first split in the SDF took place because of the money from Abacha. Fru Ndi, well known for his 'big eye' as far as money was concerned, is said to have kept the lion's share of the money from Abacha for himself.

Another instance where the SDF chairman demonstrated mercenary tendencies was over the death of his wife Rose in April 2005. The eagerness with which he jumped at the assistance the Biya regime offered him to evacuate his wife after she collapsed was seen as proof that the SDF chairman would not hesitate to jump into a pit toilet if he was convinced there was money in it.

Fru Ndi had earlier shocked the socialist world by announcing at the funeral of his father, Pa Joseph Ndi, that his father taught him to do business for profit. When the SDF chairman then threatened legal action against two police commissioners for alleging that he was paid FCFA 500 million by the Biya regime to quit the coalition he had formed with Ndam Njoya ahead of the 2004 presidential election, the news was received with mixed feelings by those who knew of his romance with money. According to these critics, if Fru Ndi had to take legal action against all those who considered him rich or saw in him the rudiments of Mammon, (as he had already done to Eric Motomu and Finian Tim, the publishers

of *Chronicle* and *Time Life* magazine respectively) then three-quarters of Cameroonians would soon have been parading the corridors of the nation's legal departments with him. (Mammon is one of the bad angels in Milton's poem 'Paradise Lost' who was thrown out of heaven for always admiring or coveting the gold in the corridors of the celestial city.)



Tribute To Machiavelli

Niccolo Machiavelli is a name that no politician is indifferent to. Even those who claim to be the most devout Christians would admit that to succeed in politics a certain degree of ruthlessness is necessary. Politics is about grabbing power and keeping it. When in his book *The Prince* Machiavelli says the ruler must be both a lion and a fox, we should do him the honour of taking him at his word. When a politician who appears to be living in opulence tells you that he is not running for Parliament to enrich himself, we believe him without reflecting that nobody ever has enough. If we agree that Parliament which is known in French as *parlement* is a derivation of two words *parler* (to speak) and *mentir* (to tell lies), then an MP needs more than mere words to prove that the people and not his personal aggrandizement are his *raison d'être* for entering Parliament.

When a politician says his mission is to bring about change and poses as the Messiah, we take him for his word. Since the return of multiparty democracy to Cameroon, only one political party has changed its leadership: the Liberal Democratic Party became the Liberal Democratic Alliance. The same persons have remained at the helm of all the major parties, including even the SDF which claimed it was out for change and vowed that Biya should go. If power is that sweet to them who only pick crumbs that drop from the table of the incumbent, then we can imagine how delicious it is to he who is at the helm of the state controlling everything.

The year 1998 saw the beginning of a concatenation of events that demonstrated how deeply rooted the spirit of Machiavelli was in the party. The first was a rebellion in the SDF, whereby Mahamat Souleymane, the party's first national vice chairman announced that he was going to hold a convention in Yaoundé. The last convention of the party was held in 1996 in Buea and Souleymane thought the next one billed for Yaoundé was overdue.

But the national vice chairman had other grievances with his party's leadership. He took exception to the manner in which the party was run. To him, the leadership of the SDF would not be able to effect

the change and democracy it preached if things continued the way they were. He also did not like the marginalization of Francophones in the SDF.

The convention was first billed for 28 November to 1 December 1998 but was later moved to 18-20 December. When Fru Ndi learnt of the planned convention, an emergency NEC meeting was convened and Souleymane promptly dismissed from the party in conformity with Article 8.2 of the SDF Constitution. According to this article, any individual or group of individuals engaged in activities that threatened the existence, interest or welfare of the party was considered as having automatically excluded himself/themselves.

The dismissal decision was so swift that mediators did not have the opportunity to intervene. Moise Njambe, President of SOS Dialogue, a self-proclaimed civil-society leader, arrived at Ntarinkon after the dismissal had already taken place and Souleymane was replaced by Seidou Maidadi from the same Far North Province, like Souleyman. This is a clear example of the divide-and-rule policy that is characteristic among Cameroonian politicians.

Souleymane was, however, undeterred by the decision. He was still doggedly resolved to go ahead. Logically, the party should have educated its militants or discouraged them from attending Souleymane's convention so that it would fail. But no. Souleymane had to be stopped at all costs. Fru Ndi's argument and that of Maidadi, Mbah Ndam and other top party officials was that Souleymane was using the SDF logo and headed paper. The decision to stop him was announced during the traditional lighting of the Christmas tree at Ntarinkon on 17 December 1998.

Addressing militants, friends and sympathizers, Fru Ndi announced that no convention would be allowed in Yaoundé in the name of the SDF. 'Bring Soulemane alive or dead to Bamenda' were Fru Ndi's exact words. Maidadi was appointed commander of the mission dubbed Operation Storm Yaounde with a solemn promise by Fru Ndi that he would go down to Yaoundé if the necessity for reinforcements arose. That announcement brought the occasion to an abrupt end.

While party fanatics rejoiced over the decision to stop insurgents from destroying an organization they had fought so hard to build, more serious thinkers considered a Christmas tree lighting occasion the most inappropriate place for a declaration of war, given that Christ came to earth to foster peace.

As expected, there was violence and even bloodshed in Yaoundé when Souleymane defiantly went ahead with holding what the party's officials described as 'an illegal and unconstitutional convention' at the Yaoundé Conference Centre. As reported by Joe Dingha Pefok of *The*

Past, there were running clashes between supporters of the SDF dissidents and loyal militants which left several injured. Dozens were hospitalized.

The first day of the convention was characterized by a free-for-all fight in which Souleymane's supporters overpowered loyalists. Some outspoken ones like Mrs Garba were thrashed. Another loyal SDF militant was flung down the stairs of the conference centre like a log of wood.

It was then that the SDF officials in Yaoundé fired an SOS to Chairman Fru Ndi in Bamenda to send in reinforcements. On Saturday 19 December, three busloads of no-nonsense SDF vanguards from Bamenda and two from Douala breezed into Yaoundé and took the conference centre by storm. The taskforce chased away all those who had gathered for the convention. The battle with Souleymane supporters led to several casualties, especially on the latter's side.

Later, the SDF taskforce was informed that some of the committees of the 'illegal' convention were meeting secretly at Takoudjou's Bastos residence. (Dr. Takoudjou Christophe, a sacked NEC member, who was founder of a political party, MBA, was the person under whose cover Souleymane held the convention.) They also stormed Takoudjou's residence and chased away the dissidents with rubber whips. Takoudjou reportedly took cover under a bed but was soon fished out and handed over a pile of documents linked to the convention. The shivering Takoudjou was taken by bus to the conference centre where he was challenged to go ahead with the convention. He was, however, rescued by some senior SDF officials who handed him over to the police for protection. Souleymane had vamoosed.

After learning of this development, the DO of Yaoundé II, Bouba Nasrou, who signed the authorization for the Takoudjou's congress, immediately banned it on 19 December.

Gathering Clouds

Prior to the convention, a public demonstration and rally, scheduled for 18 December in Yaoundé by the SDF Centre Provincial Bureau headed by Sani Alhadji, failed to be held because of the visit by the President of Congo Brazzaville to Yaoundé starting that day. However, Sani Alhadji that morning deployed SDF security agents (vanguards) to hang-out at the conference centre and the Hilton Hotel to prevent the holding of any illegal or unconstitutional party convention.

SDF Secretary General Tazoacha Asonganyi stormed the conference centre that morning to protest to the authorities against an alleged decision to hire out their hall to Souleymane for an unconstitutional convention of the Social Democratic Front. But the

authorities refuted the allegation by presenting a copy of the official calendar of activities billed for the conference centre that week (14-20 December). The programme showed that Dr Takoudjou Christophe had hired the hall for a meeting of his party (not the Social Democratic Front). But SDF vanguards and militants at the conference centre were not convinced and warned that there would be shooting if the authorities at the conference centre allowed the Souleymane convention to be held there.

Frightened, the authorities at the conference centre sent out a distress call to the security services. With Congo Brazaville President Sasse Nguesso in town and staying at Mont FEBE, not far away, five truckloads of the dreaded presidential guards were also rushed in to back up police who were already near the conference venue. They took up strategic positions around the conference centre but watched silently as events unfolded.

At the conference centre, entry into the hall was strictly controlled by the security agents of Souleymane/Takoudjou, led by Amadou Baba. Inside the hall, the organizer (Takoudjou) attributed the situation as well as the delay to the start of the convention (it started a couple of hours late) to the fact that many of Yaoundé's streets were blocked because of the arrival of the Congolese president.

No SDF parliamentarian was to be seen in the hall. Reporters spotted a few well-known SDF militants like Orlando Monju as well as one of Hon. Mbah Ndam's drivers. They were reportedly there as SDF agents even though Souleymane recognized them and referred to them as his friends.

Documents obtained by *The Post* showed that authorization for the convention had been issued by the DO of Yaoundé II (Bouba Nasrou) to Dr Takoudjou Christophe (receipt no. 173/RDC/J06/02/SP of 11 December 1998) under the banner of Movement des Bâtisseurs Africains.

In his opening address, Dr Takoudjou said the occasion was a congress of Social Democrats. As for the Movement des Bâtisseurs Africains (MBA), Takoudjou, who was sacked from the SDF in 1996, disclosed that it was created in Baroussam on 6 September 1997.

The Thunderstorm

When Mr Mahamat Souleymane took the floor to pronounce what was announced by Takoudjou as a (three-page) word of welcome, he presented himself as the elected First National Vice Chairman of the Social Democratic Front. Souleymane, in his speech, took observers unaware when he declared that the occasion was the 5th Ordinary Convention of the Social Democratic Front. He claimed that the

convention, which was backed by many undisclosed SDF parliamentarians and NEC members, was convened in conformity with the decision of the Buea Convention of the SDF held in 1996. Souleymane stressed that the convention in the SDF is supreme and thus declared that all the resolutions that were to be adopted by the convention he had convened would be binding to all organs of the SDF. But Souleymane was not to finish the speech as SDF security agents and elite members like Hon. Akonteh, Che Philip and Sani Alhadji, who could no longer stomach what Souleymane was saying, pushed their way into the hall and joined Monju and the like who were inside to bring the speech to an abrupt end. CRTV cameramen who had just arrived were ordered out of the hall, and a series of punches were exchanged inside the hall. Invectives floated through the air.

Souleymane was guarded by a group of fierce-looking young men who were visibly armed with weapons like daggers (knives). The youths, mostly made up of Northerners from Briqueterie and T'singa Quarters in Yaoundé, swore to turn the hall into a sea of blood if Souleymane was touched. He was not touched. Five SDF officials were arrested but later released that same evening. But a police source told *The Post* that a case file would be prepared against them for possible appearance in court if the organizers of the meeting launched an official complaint. That was Day One, which was much calmer than Day Two.

Fru Ndi Accused

Meanwhile in a telephone interview granted to *The Post* on the morning of 19 December, Mr Mahamat Souleymane vowed that he would drag Fru Ndi to court for plotting to kill him. 'I saw thugs from Fru Ndi's compound at Ntarinkon Bamenda among the vandals, and can prove what I am saying. Without me, SDF would not have been legalized. I sacrificed my job at SONARA for an income of some FCFA 3 million a month, for the sake of SDF and today some mad people talk of exclusion. Today even *The Post* which is a newspaper which I think should be respected in this country gets involved in unfair qualifications by referring to me as a rebel. It is unfortunate. How can somebody create or legalize something, and you call him a rebel later?'

Souleymane insisted that he acted in conformity with the SDF constitution. 'I was the person who translated the SDF constitution from English to French, and thus know what is right or wrong for a militant to do. I know the SDF constitution too well. You people should just wait! When I meet in court with Fru Ndi, you people will get to know how rotten he and his clique are.'

Takoudjou, Kebila Fokum and all those injured in the fight later filed complaints to the judiciary but for some unexplained reason no

action was taken. Kebila, who was hospitalized, could not eat for a month because of the damage caused to his teeth. And because of the judiciary's silence on the matter, the plaintiffs accused the Biya regime of complicity with the SDF hierarchy. But this rebuke still produced no action. Fru Ndi justified the action on grounds that those who organized the Yaoundé 'convention' were out to split the party in the way other political formations had been splintered.

What the SDF hierarchy found more difficult to justify was the beating of journalists who had come to the conference centre only to cover an event. The party later muted an apology for the treatment given to the RFI correspondent. As for Kebila Fokum, they had no remorse, with Fru Ndi's supporters arguing that Kebila, who was the publisher of *The Messenger*, had attended the convention as Souleymane's press officer and not as the publisher of an independent newspaper. 'We beat a politician, not a journalist', one of them promptly told me.

It is worth noting that members of the presidential guards stood and watched Souleymane and his supporters brutalized. Some of the victims looked at them pleadingly, hoping to see them intervene but the guards instead mocked the victims, blaming them for stirring up the hornet's nest in the first place.

Another controversy connected with the convention was the instruction Fru Ndi gave about bringing Souleymane to Bamenda. As stated earlier, he wanted Souleymane brought to Bamenda 'dead or alive'. When he later learnt that Souleymane and his supporters were contemplating court action, Fru Ndi and his supporters quaked in their shoes. The SDF chairman started refuting the statement saying he had ordered Souleymane be brought in alive. If he wanted Souleymane brought in alive, he should have simply said 'Bring Souleymane to Bamenda'. It is shameful that even journalists who heard the Chairman's original instructions later reported the doctored version to please Fru Ndi.

Another remarkable outcome of Operation Storm Yaoundé was that it provided the Biya regime with a golden opportunity to blackmail the SDF. This was by brandishing the case files of Souleymane and Takoudjou before Fru Ndi and his partners-in-crime each time they were intransigent. Biya boasted a year later that he helped Fru Ndi by rejecting top SDF officials who pleaded to be absorbed into the CPDM government.



The Law of Karma

The idea that human beings pay for all their mischief on earth is nothing new. Writers call it 'poetic justice' because it was first advocated by poets who substantiated it in their poems. Others call it the Law of Karma. The misdemeanours of those who called the shots in the SDF and those who followed instructions without reflecting could not go unpunished by natural law since somehow they had managed to evade the laws of man.

At the start of 1999, John Fru Ndi collapsed, vomited blood and was thought to be dying. It required the prompt action of Giles Kwende, his personal physician to save his life. After receiving immediate medical attention, he was evacuated to the US for treatment. He recovered and came back but that was not the end of the matter. Somebody had to be held responsible for the illness which seemed to stem from food poisoning. As food poisoning is usually interpreted by simple and prosaic minds as meaning poison has been put in somebody's food, accusing fingers began pointing in the direction of the chairman's suspected enemies.

The first name that the rumour machine churned out was Na'mukong Andrew Akonteh. Here I deem it necessary to state who Akonteh really was and why he easily became the *bête noire* of Fru Ndi's admirers. Akonteh had been Fru Ndi's favourite in the early 1990s because he demonstrated naked courage and castigated the Biya regime with almost the same degree of vehemence as his political boss. Because of this, he was unanimously acclaimed SDF chairman for the Northwest Province. Party militants nicknamed him Papa Zangelewa because of a popular song *Zangelewa* which he intoned as the prologue to his usually well-attended rallies. The Administrative dreaded Akonteh for the same measure as Fu Ndi, for his force of oratory. Turbulent in wit, SDF militants obeyed Akonteh without question and his condemnation of any government official or seeming traitor was sufficient reason for that official or individual to be seen as Public Enemy One. He was adored by both old and young and the best means by which colleagues convinced anybody within or even outside the party was that a piece of information

was true was to say it came from the lips of either Fru Ndi or Akonteh.

When therefore the SDF agreed to take part in the 1997 elections, Akonteh was unanimously chosen to represent his party in his Bafut-Tubah constituency. It was widely believed that the first tremors of the 'earthquake' which Fru Ndi had assured the world that his militants would cause in the Assembly would be triggered by Akonteh. And to prove how much the party banked on him, Akonteh was, on his party's recommendations, appointed to the very lucrative post of Questor when he entered Parliament.

Akonteh began well. It was he who initiated the investigations into corruption in high places that ended up landing Seidou Mounchipou, the minister of post and telecommunication in Kondengui Maximum Security Prison, alongside some of his accomplices. But that was where Akonteh's luck ended. Socially he was seen as the epitome of egoism. Those who were not lambasting him as a fop, saw in his every action a calculated snub. The late Bate Besong, an acerbic critic summed up Akonteh's conduct in an essay titled 'The Decay of the SDF on the Beatification of Na,mukong Andrew Akonteh,Questor'. *The Herald*, the leading English language newspaper at the time, described him as 'a chicken come home to roost'. It could be said of Akonteh what John Dryden said of Zimri, one of his characters in *Absalom and Achitopel*. Zimri, according to the poet, was

Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman and buffoon.
Then all for women, rhyming, painting, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.

Fru Ndi, who was aware of how high his former favourite had fallen in public esteem, thought it was the time to launch his own verbal missile. Akonteh, I learnt from Ntarinkon sources, offered Fru Ndi FCFA 100,000 as his own contribution towards the upkeep of his chairman. This was said to be the first time Akonteh had given Fru Ndi money since he entered the National Assembly. But to his embarrassment, Fru Ndi told him off. 'Andrew,' Fru Ndi is quoted as saying, 'You give me only 100,000 francs. Do you think I can use that amount to feed the mammoth crowd that visit me every day in this house?' Akonteh is said not to have taken kindly to the rebuke which took place in the presence of other party officials and militants. He fired back, giving the impression that he expected Fru Ndi to express gratitude for the gift. Details of what happened next were not given. All I gathered was that Fru Ndi resolved

to ensure Akonteh was removed and replaced him with Emmanuel Yoyo, one of his favourites. He kept the promise and in the very next parliamentary session Akonteh was no longer Questor.

Given the enormous financial advantages the holder of a parliamentary bureau has, it is easy and logical to conclude that whoever loses such a post would be very slow to forgive the author of his misfortune. That is why the rumour machine quickly included Akonteh's name on the list of suspects for the poisoning of Fru Ndi.

In fairness to Akonteh, it must be said that the politician, an ex-seminarian, never contemplated, let alone, carried out the poisoning of Fru Ndi, according to my personal investigations. The former Assembly Questor's crime was that he dared to question why the Widikum tribe to which Fru Ndi belonged were those calling the shots in the party to the detriment of the Tikari tribe which played a greater part in fostering SDF ideas. Akonteh had put the statistics on paper as proof of this dominance, and this piece of paper got into Fru Ndi's hand. The SDF chairman decided to make about 1000 photocopies which he distributed when he was in the US for medical treatment. According to him, Akonteh not only wanted him (Fru Ndi) dead but nursed 'diabolic plans' to destabilize the SDF. The story that Akonteh was the author of Fru Ndi's illness could therefore be traced to Fru Ndi's doorstep. Akonteh later decided not to stand as a candidate in the 2002 parliamentary elections when he realized that the mind of the electorate was irreparably poisoned against him. It was also certain that the party's National Investiture Committee was unlikely to select him.

The person who almost paid the supreme price, however, was Samuel Chop, the provincial vice chairman and a government secondary school teacher who had served briefly as Akonteh's personal secretary when he was still Questor and was later dropped. Akonteh made Chop believe that he had been dropped because his (Chop's) minister was opposed to the idea that he should work on secondment at the Assembly. But the 'School for Scandal' at Ntarinkon gave a malicious twist to the story. It gave the public the impression that it was Akonteh himself who decided otherwise, preferring a brother-in-law to a devoted friend and party colleague. It is not certain if Chop knew this version of the story or whether he would have believed it if he heard it. Chop was to receive a snake beating from Fru Ndi's bodyguards at Ntamulung Church Centre when he attempted to hold a press conference calling for the unity of all SDF founding fathers. They had boycotted the party because of what they described as Fru Ndi's highhandedness. What pained many persons about the assault on Chop was the fact that Chop cancelled the press conference when the party objected to it, just as it had opposed the previous idea of a demonstration along Bamenda's Commercial Avenue.

It was at Ntamulung Church Centre that the late Siga Asanga had booked for a press conference to explain his grievances against Fru Ndi and collaborators. Asanga boycotted his own press conference, allegedly because of intimidation from Fru Ndi's supporters. He later tried to hold the press conference at the Catholic youth centre near the St Joseph's Metropolitan Cathedral when stone-throwing SDF fanatics made this impossible. But for Asanga's prompt decision to stop the conference there might have been another murder at the cathedral.

In February 1999 Fru Ndi had the worst embarrassment yet of his political career. The Yaoundé magistrate's court slammed on him a three-year suspended sentence for defamation and he had to pay FCFA 50,000. He had been dragged to court by Basile Kamdoun, the former SDF coordinator for the Centre Province. Fru Ndi had granted an interview to *La Nouvelle Expression*, a pro-SDF French language paper, accusing Kamdoun of embezzling party funds and scheming to destroy the SDF.

The case was first heard on 3 December 1998. But Fru Ndi could not state the exact amount embezzled. He was not in court the day judgment was passed. The Law of Karma was to manifest itself after another murderous venture by SDF zealots acting presumably on Fru Ndi's instructions. The Northwest SDF had held a convention in Wum, Menchum Division which ended with the election of Martin Fon Yembe, Fru Ndi's favourite at the time (his favourites change with every political season). Bui SDF militants whose candidate for the provincial chairmanship had been contested and lost the election in Wum felt cheated because Fru Ndi's supporters had backed Yembe, openly referring to him as the 'chairman's candidate'. They then resolved to hold an SDF district conference in Jakiri, one of the scenes where the 1997 terrorist attacks had taken place. Fru Ndi issued a press release again ordering that no such meeting should be held. The organizers were determined to proceed. Anthony Venyena, then head of Fru Ndi's security service, first went on a diplomatic offensive to discourage the organizers of the meeting and when diplomacy failed, the military option became imperative, according to Fru Ndi's apologists. As in the case of the Yaoundé conference, a 'militia' was dispatched to Bui on 10 September, the date of the meeting. The brutality that took place in Jakiri made Operation Storm Yaoundé look like child's play by comparison. Michael Mbinkar, MP for Jakiri and Boniface Mbinkar Bamendjo were given snake beatings which incapacitated them. The case of Michael Mbinkar was worse because one of his assailants, a karate expert, had used his 'iron head' to hit that of the MP Donatus Njong, the mayor of Kumbo who was one of the organizers of the conference and only escaped thanks to the nimbleness of his feet. The assailants were not

content with brutalizing their victims. I learnt from a party insider that one of the commandos sent to stop the meeting had his own hidden agenda which was to settle scores with the one of the conference organizers and actually went to Jakiri with a gallon of liquid extracted from a corpse. The liquid, known locally as *musung*, corrodes the body of the victim and causes death. But apparently, he did not have the opportunity to use it because the victim succeeded in escaping before the fighting began. His comrade-in-arms mistook it for petrol and poured it on an MP's car that he wanted to set fire to. But to his embarrassment it failed to ignite when he struck a match. It was only later that he was told the truth. The person who plotted the mischief was later attacked by godfire, a disease that also has a corrosive effect on the body of the sufferer. Philip Che, then a provincial party official who took part in the beatings, later succeeded to enter Parliament. He soon fell out of favour with the SDF for the same reason that led to the rustication of Akonteh and was politically isolated. His nemesis was reportedly precipitated by the fact that he fell into the hands of feymen who reportedly 'dry-cleaned him'. Despite his unpopularity, he was still elected in the election primaries to run for Parliament thanks to the voting system in the SDF which gives rich corrupt officials an edge over poor honest ones. Those who vote at SDF primaries are ward or district chairmen and a few elected officials who can easily be bribed. All a non-performing parliamentarian or mayor can do is to stockpile bank notes to corrupt voters. But though Philip Che succeeded, the party's investiture denied him the mandate. Misfortune equally dogged the footsteps of the party's flag bearer in the parliamentary election that followed. Before examining the next elections, I deem it necessary to revisit another genocide more bloody than that of Ndu but carried out with the same intention, namely to punish a pro-opposition electorate and reduce the number of eligible voters against the CPDM regime. Douala, the country's economic capital, was the scene of the macabre drama.



The Cardinal, Politicians & State Terror

Power is sweet to everybody, including soldiers. The wisest decision of any democratic government is to keep soldiers in their barracks and as far away from power as possible. Only dictatorial regimes share power with the military. This is because they are not democratically elected and know that without military backing they cannot last. The Biya regime is in reality a diarchy — a civilian regime sharing power with the military. The Biya regime began power sharing with the military when Gilbert Andze Tsoungui, Biya's minister of armed forces, created a taskforce to counter the rebels of the 6 April 1984 coup attempt. With the return of multiparty politics, Biya used the army to combat opposition supporters. In the process, soldiers died alongside opposition activists.

Operational Command

This is the name given to a hit squad set up in 1999 to combat the high crime rate in Douala. Its creation was preceded by acts of aggression on Western citizens in Douala and Yaoundé. As reported by the press, the US Ambassador in Yaoundé was wounded during an encounter with bandits. Earlier, Nourry, a French butcher, had been killed by men of Douala's underworld. Because Cameroon's security forces had demonstrated gross inefficiency in combating urban crime, a vigilante group was formed by French citizens in Douala to protect themselves.

Biya saw this move as an insult to Cameroon's security system and signed Presidential Decree No. 2000/27 of 20/01/2000 creating the Operational Command to assist the gendarmerie and police in fighting crime in Douala. As narrated by Cardinal Christian Tumi in his book *The Political Regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo and Paul Biya, and Christian Tumi Priest*, the Operational Command soon degenerated into a squad that meted out torture and summary executions. In a letter to the governor of the Littoral Province dated 6 June 2000, Tumi noted that most of their victims were no longer armed robbers; that civilians took advantage of the readiness of this force to settle scores by submitting the names of their enemies who were arrested, tortured and killed without any verification. Corpses of both bandits and suspects were strewn along

streets in Douala. Police raids were also commonplace. People, including school children, were forced out of taxis, buses and private cars and made to sit on the bare ground before being savagely thrashed. Wounded and bleeding, many of these persons were made to roll on the ground before being carted away in buses to Bonanjo anti-gang brigades and gendarmerie stations where they were tortured and confessions extracted from them. Most of those arrested were either forced to buy their liberty or money, jewellery and other valuable items were seized from them.

Tumi's letter cited the case of a particular lady specialized in torture and during torture pregnant women often lost their babies. People were detained for several days in very unhygienic conditions, most were not given food and some died due to starvation. Most of the female victims, the letter said, were the girlfriends of brigands detained on the pretext that through them the whereabouts of their suspects could be known. That was the official reason given but the true reason was that some of these girls had rejected the amorous advances of the lecherous military men in control. The letter also cites the case of a young photographer who was executed in front of his wife. The worst cases of human rights abuse cited by the cardinal's letter was the practice of killing parents who failed to produce their children who were suspected of having committed crimes. And even after some suspects were charged in court and then set free, members of the Operational Command still pursued and shot them. The letter also described extrajudicial executions as gross human rights abuses condemned even by the Cameroon constitution. He concluded by telling the governor that he was not supporting thieves and highwaymen but simply arguing that they be brought before a court and punished according to their crime. As he expected, the governor never replied his letter.

Not to appear complacent or in support of bandits, Tumi wrote another letter to the highway robbers calling on them to stop their diabolic practices and repent and God would forgive their sins. He cited the case of the robber crucified alongside Jesus Christ and was forgiven when he repented and asked Christ to remember him while in paradise. The highwaymen, like the governor, also did not reply.

But what drew international attention to the atrocities of the Operational Command was the story of nine young men whose whereabouts could not be traced after they were arrested on allegations that they had stolen a gas bottle. The story is narrated in detail in Cardinal Tumi's book.

According to the account, the cardinal received a delegation of several families living in the Bepanda neighbourhood on 22 January 2001 who reported the matter to him. He then designated his chancellor, Father Jean-Pierre Mukengeshayi, to work with the aggrieved families.

Together, the priest and the families began visiting police and gendarmerie cells where the nine youths could be detained. But though they got useful hints in the course of their investigations, their whereabouts could not be traced. At the naval base, a sinister place that was well known as a torture centre, they were directed to the Operational Command headquarters known as 'Kosovo' because of the severity of the torture meted out to detainees. There they not only failed to see the nine youths but warned to tell Tumi that he was not head of state and should mind the affairs of the diocese where he was head.

An attempt to meet General Philip Mpay, head of the Operational Command Unit, also proved abortive. They were told that the general was too busy and in any case would not receive bandits' accomplices! Just when they were starting to despair, two security officials, pushed by the force of truth, went to the Douala Archdiocese of their own volition and testified on conditions of anonymity that they witnessed the execution of the nine young men at a quarry in Edea, a town in the Littoral Province. 'They were wrecks when they were being executed because of the torture they had endured,' the chancellor of the diocese was told.

Convinced by the story, the chancellor granted an interview to the Catholic newspaper *L'Effort Camerounaise* in which he announced that the nine young men were no longer alive. He recalled a similar observation made by the Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) and he was categorical that the young men would have been released if they were still alive and described their deaths as shameful for the Operational Command.

He did not confirm newspaper allegations that the Bepanda Nine might have been dissolved in acid since he had no facts pertaining to their possible incineration. Nor could he ascertain the whereabouts of the authors of the tragedy, Souki and Captain Aba, while some people said Souki was in Ngaoundere, others said she was in Mbalmayo. As for Captain Aba, he said, all attempts to get to him had been futile. He was vexed that nine lives could be so easily terminated on the mere suspicion of stealing a gas bottle, while the real thieves in Cameroon are expensively dressed and drive luxury cars. Cardinal Tumi's chancellor likened the regime in Cameroon to the Gestapo or Ceausescu's Romania.

He concluded by calling on the Biya regime to tell the Cameroonian people the truth about the victims as they had the right to know what had happened to them. Because of the interview, the delegate general for national security, who feared that its rippling effects would cause a breach of public peace in Douala, invited the chancellor to Yaoundé.

Tumi's Sharp Razor

This was not the cardinal's first scrape with the Biya regime. On the eve of the 2004 elections, the regime had been jittery about him because of a clamour by opposition supporters that he should become the opposition's only candidate. But despite the cardinal's explanation that he had taken a vow since he became priest never to become involved in partisan politics, the regime was unconvinced. In an interview granted *Jeune Afrique Economie*, he not only denounced the Biya regime's rigging ploys but declared that, as a Cameroonian, he had the right to aspire to the highest position in the country.

Tumi had embarrassed the regime more than once by openly declaring in press interviews that all the ingredients for civil war existed in Cameroon. Actions like praying at Ahidjo's grave in Senegal and the recent publication that exposed certain malpractices of the Ahidjo and Biya regimes have had devastating and destabilizing effects on the regime. His letters to Ferdinand Koungou Edima and Jacques Fame Ndongu, two of Biya's overzealous ministers, in reply to attacks on him greatly endeared Tumi to many Cameroonians who saw in him their mouthpiece following the deliberate emasculation of the Cameroonian opposition by the Biya regime.

But causing the Biya regime to disband the Operational Command remains Tumi's greatest achievement. It was, in fact, his letter to Littoral Emmanuel Eban Otong and the exposure of the Bepanda Nine atrocity that led to the termination of that inhumane military unit.

Tumi's candour, accessibility and humility are qualities that endeared him to Christians and Muslims alike. On one occasion, the cardinal caused quite a stir in Douala when he mounted a commercial motorbike, locally called 'bendskin', that took him to Douala airport. He was to travel and his flight was about to leave so he chose the fastest means to get to the airport in view of the traffic jams. '*Le Cardinal Sur le Bendskin*' was the headline in *Popoli*, a satirical publication that caricatures news-making personalities.

Cardinal Tumi's open condemnation of the atrocities of Operational Command was a source of inspiration to many political leaders. Djeukam Tchameni and other concerned political activists were so interested in the Bepanda Nine Affair that they formed an association titled *Collectif National Contre L'Impunite* (National Committee against Impunity) which proceeded to sue Biya in a Belgian court.

SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi took a more practical approach to the problem. He issued a press statement, a copy of which he gave to me, in which he announced his intention to lead a demonstration in Douala. When *Le Messager* and other French newspapers took up the story first published in *The Post*, panic gripped the Biya regime, which immediately

resorted to the use of force, the only strategy it knew or believed in. But on 7 April 2001, Fru Ndi surprised troops stationed at Bepanda to stop the demonstration after circumventing and then slipping out of the hands of other security operatives placed along the country's major highways with instructions not to let him enter the economic capital. As early as 6 am, the troops in Douala blocked all entrances into Bepanda neighbourhood so that Fru Ndi could not meet the families of the unfortunate youths. No cars or commercial motorcycles were permitted to move in that direction and groups of people were not allowed to gather. To further militarize the town and discourage demonstrations, combat-ready troops were also stationed at Deido roundabout, the gateway to Douala city. Over 100 student policemen were brought in from Mutengene Police School and water cannons crisscrossed Douala menacingly.

In spite of the military build-up, SDF militants thronged Deido roundabout at 10 am as Fru Ndi appeared, accompanied by some SDF MPs and other equally daring militants. Troops immediately surrounded them and within seconds water cannons swung into action. Party bigwigs ran in all directions but Fru Ndi continued, despite the force of the water from the water cannons and much to the amazement of the police.

The spraying, however, stopped after the arrival of Laurent Minja, SDO for Wouri Division where the drama took place. The SDO apologized for all that had happened, saying he was not aware the SDF chairman was in town. He acknowledged the right of people to demonstrate peacefully against an action they did not approve of but said an authorization should be obtained first. He confessed that every government made errors and that President Biya had promised to solve the problem.

Fru Ndi, who was later admitted to Polyclinic Muna, sent an ultimatum that his militants, among whom was the MP Moukouri Manga Bell who had been kept in the sun by the police for six hours, should be released. Failure to do this, he said, would provoke the SDF to return to the streets. The Administration bowed to the ultimatum but this did not stop the police from subjecting SDF militants, still within sight, to another spate of water cannon attacks which disrupted economic activities in the area. Moukoury, who later spoke to the press, described Cameroon as a lawless state.

Another interesting development in the Bepanda Nine affair was an interview later granted by Dr Solomon Nfor Gwei, chairman of the government-created National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF). The interview was conducted by Charly Ndi Chia, editor-in-chief of *The Post* and published in edition no. 0271 of Friday 11 May 2001.

In the interview, Nfor Gwei (now dead), the NCHRF chairman said 13 and not 9 youths disappeared from 'Kosovo', quoting authorities at the torture centre. According to the story, the nine young men were detained alongside four international gangsters who helped them escape by digging their way out of the 'Kosovo' Gulag using a ladder to complete their escape. He described such a story as incredible and said he and other members of his Commission made attempts to get to General Philip Mpay, erstwhile head of the Operational Command, who refused to receive them, even after the intervention of Littoral Provincial governor.

The latest development so far in the Bepanda Nine affair is the declaration of two former police commissioners, on self-exile, that they are ready to reopen the lid on it. Albert Leopold Ebene, one of the two commissioners who were sacked from the police force on charges of preying on two French journalists on a mission to Cameroon, said they possessed incriminating evidence against the Biya regime on the matter. The duo also claim that more than 600 persons perished in Douala alone during the reign of Operational Command, according to a the lead story published in *The Herald* in edition no. 1956 on Friday 13 July 2007.

The Herald's story recollects how the nine youths, Effie Chia, Jean Charly Kwete, Fabrice Kwate Elyse Kouatu, Chia Nain, Frederic Nguoffo, Charles Reuben Kouou., Marc Etoha and Jean Roger Tchiwan were arrested on 23 January 2001 on charges of stealing a 12-kg butane cooking gas bottle. After relatives chimed initial alarm bells goes the narrative, it emerged days later that the suspects had disappeared from police custody, and Biya was forced to order a probe after family members and human rights groups, among them Amnesty International and the international Federation of Human Rights League cried foul. The investigations culminated in the transfer from Douala of General Philip Mpay, the dreaded head of the Operational Command, to Bamenda. To date, no results have been published on the findings of the commission set to investigate the matter. And so far no compensation has been paid to their families.

The end of the Operational Command was not, however the end of the Biya regime's terror on its citizens. Six years later, security officials and members of Biya's administration continued the senseless killings of civilians. On Monday 17 September 2007, the SDO of Uppetr Nyong Division, Sylvester Essama, opened fire on Abong Mbang, headquarters of the division, killing two people. The victims were students at the Lycee Classique Abong Mbang protesting against prolonged blackouts and frequent water cuts. A demonstration against the same power cuts by the electricity supply company, AES-SONEL, resulted in the killing of two other students, Herbert Ngome, a student at the Cameroon College of

Science, CCAST Kumba, and Napoleon Ngoe of CETIC, a technical school, both in Kumba, Southwest Province. That was on Wednesday 7 October 2007. On Tuesday 17 October 2007, Simon Ambe and Patrick Nche Tabong were shot in Bamenda during a protest against police harassment by commercial motor bike riders. There is no sign that the Biya regime will reverse its policy of violence or employ dialogue as the best approach to the resolution of social conflicts. Not in the foreseeable future at least.



Spiritual Democracy

Before the creation of Operational Command in the SDF, MPs had in the year 2000 done something spectacular that to a considerable degree substantiated Fru Ndi's promise of an impending 'earthquake' as his MPs took up positions in the National Assembly. SDF MPs attempted a march on the presidential palace in Etoudi, Yaoundé. The essence of the demonstration was to draw public attention, including that of the diplomatic corps, to the reluctance of the Biya regime to carry out democratic reforms in Cameroon. Alerting the international community is one thing the Biya regime dreads because its survival is dependent on foreign financial donors. Even if the country is burning, let the international community be ignorant of the facts. It was in an attempt to stop the MPs that public attention was drawn to the event, especially as security operatives, sent to stop the parliamentarians, inevitably clashed with them. Realizing how determined the MPs were and given that their immunity shielded them from instant arrest and prosecution, Biya was left with no alternative than to sign a decree creating an election-monitoring organ. The National Elections Observatory (NEO), as it was called, had eleven members, at least one from each of Cameroon's ten province and had as principal function the supervision and control of elections.

Its detractors, judging the body by the word 'Observatory', quickly concluded that its function did not extend beyond simply watching the electoral process and commenting on it. In reality, the NEO's powers were limited as it could not declare the final results of elections, a function still to be carried out by the Supreme Court acting in the place of the Constitutional Council, but it was certainly not the 'toothless bulldog' and loud sounding nothing which many observers perceived it to be. The NEO's pioneer president was an ailing one-time member of government by the name of Enoch Kwayeb who unfortunately died without striking an electoral blow and was replaced by a lawyer, Francois Xavier Mbuyom, from the same West Province. The vice president was an Anglophone, Diana Acha Morfaw, who to date is the only woman in the Observatory.

However the person whose activities gave the NEO the greatest

measure of credibility in the eyes of Cameroonians and the international community was Nico Halle, the Northwest representative. He is a lawyer and international legal consultant based in Douala. Before his appointment, he had been chosen by the traditional rulers (Fons) of his province of origin to be their Ntumfor or ambassador. This was in recognition of work initiatives he had undertaken over the previous two decades or more towards the advancement of unity and peace in the province. It was he who strove to make the public understand the real function of the NEO. Its detractors had to come to terms with the harsh reality that it was prejudicial to condemn a structure or organization without first giving it a chance. Those who continued to nurse doubts about the NEO underwent an intellectual metamorphosis after attending the first sensitization meetings organized by Ntumfor on the eve of the 2002 double elections, meetings that began and ended with prayers and brought together stakeholders in the electoral process. These included political party leaders, the administration, civil society and even clergymen and women. Those who had initially considered the NEO as an elaborate joke listened in total bewilderment as the NEO representative castigated potential election riggers and gave senior divisional officers firm instructions against election rigging. He did not end at giving instructions. Ntumfor personally went to the field and kept members of the administration on tenterhooks, ordering them to bring electoral registers and expunging the names of ghost or non-existent voters. He ordered that polling stations be removed from palaces and private premises. The idea was to put an abrupt stop to the practice whereby traditional rulers and powerful individuals took advantage of their positions to rig elections in favour of parties they adhered to. The NEO representative held strongly that free, fair and transparent elections were guarantors of peace and that 95% of the wars in the world have electoral malpractice as their root cause. It was also his firm conviction that credible elections would give Cameroon significant bargaining power with the international community and would mean that investors would want to become involved in a country where there was democracy, peace and, above all, accountability.

The most arduous task of the NEO representative was the recruitment and training of NEO monitors and delegates to oversee the electoral process. These officials, drawn from different backgrounds, were told that they should not allow themselves to be manipulated by whomsoever for any amount of money and that they owed an obligation to their consciences, the Cameroonian people and to God Almighty. The monitors and delegates after training were sworn in at the law courts. Those who thought the NEO coordinator was joking when he warned that those who played games would be sanctioned had a rude shock when

some of them were promptly dismissed on the discovery of an anomaly in their records or conduct. These even included lawyers and pastors. Peter Njah, a pastor, who was shown the door, did not believe it when it happened. He had gone ahead to make press statements about the NEO that were unfounded, while Cyril Njumbam, a lawyer was sacked when it was discovered that he militated in a political party, whereas the law required absolute neutrality on the part of NEO officials. Florence Nde, a female NEO monitor was sacked for the same reason as the lawyer.

It would be erroneous to believe that Ntumfor Nico Halle was hailed by everybody for trying to bring sanity to the electoral process. This would be as erroneous as saying that Christ was liked for rebuking the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. In short, Ntumfor became an enemy a real enemy of those for whom electoral victory was a do-or-die affair. The most outstanding opponents of the NEO coordinator's crusade for transparent elections were members of a fraternity that termed itself the Santa Mafia. This group has as patron Hon. Simon Achidi Achu, a former prime minister, who hails from Santa Subdivision in Mezam Division and whose headquarters is in Bamenda. Before the creation of the NEO it was an accepted misdemeanour that Achidi Achu should harbour a polling station at his Rock Farm Estate and produce as many votes for the ruling party as he possibly could without raising too loud an alarm. He was, therefore, anything but comfortable with Ntumfor's stand that what was right must be right everywhere and that Rock Farm should not be an exception to the rule that a polling station in an individual's estate is in the wrong location.

This declaration was damaging enough to make the former premier lose his usual calm and serenity. Hon. Achu was so vexed that he openly denounced the NEO representative on the eve of 22 July 2007. He said that the NEO's function was only to observe elections and had no business relocating polling stations. But the NEO representative stood his grounds and the polling stations were removed from all private premises and the mafia had to content itself with circulating tracts which insinuated that the NEO representative had been hired to ensure they lost elections in their newly created Santa constituency.

The reaction of the NEO representative was instantaneous. Besides maintaining that he was following the law and absolutely nothing else, he lashed out at the Santa Mafia, placing the outfit in a light in which they had never been seen before. 'As far as I am concerned, there is nothing and there will never be anything positive about a Mafia.' The Mafia to him meant nothing short of ruthlessness, Machiavellian inclinations and wickedness. In short, everything negative.

The majority of Cameroonians agreed with Ntumfor, many recalling stories they had read about the Mafia. I recalled in particular the

words of James Hadley Chase, the author of sex and crime fiction, who illustrates in one of his books how nobody ever steals from the Mafia and lives to enjoy what s/he has pilfered. Despite the public outcry, the Santa Mafia was still resolute about winning the elections by whatever means.

To achieve this goal they enlisted the services of youth, a majority of them unemployed university graduates, mainly from the big towns of Douala, Yaoundé, and Bafoussam. These ambulant voters were given enough money to embolden them so that they could move from one polling station to another voting as many times as they could.

To stop them, SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi went to Santa accompanied by his vanguards and personally apprehended some of the election gangsters in whose pockets bundles of vote cards and new banknotes were found, proof that they had been bankrolled to do what they had been caught in the process of. The NEO coordinator, who had warned against the hiring of ambulant voters, saw them and alerted the security forces to arrest them. But for his intervention, a number of them would have been lynched by the mob that was made up principally of opposition supporters. The vote count that took place beginning at 6 pm ended with results showing that the opposition SDF had won.

Since election results in Cameroon have in the past been determined only by agents of the ruling party – the SDOs and DOs – the Santa Mafia, who thought that as it was in the beginning so it was then politically and ever would be, was not discouraged by their defeat after the counting. They had a trump card in Abraham Chekem, the DO of Santa who had assured the Mafia that he would do the figure trick.

In committing himself, the DO apparently had not taken into consideration the determination of the NEO representative to ensure that elections were credible. They also overlooked the sentiments of the electorate who were determined that their hard-earned electoral victory would not be stolen. The electorate proved their determination by their massive presence at the DO's office. After three days of wrangling that ended up at the Bamenda High Court, the SDF was declared the winner by just three votes. At the time of writing, the Santa Mafia is still determined to be seen as the true winner who has been deprived of a deserved victory. Of course, everybody knew the *raison d'être* of their Spartan determination to win: they wanted the return of the PM's post which the Mafia boss, Achidi Achu, had lost 11 years earlier.

Besides his transparent management of the elections, Ntumfor is greatly loved by the population for his philanthropy and particularly by journalists for his declaration that the press is in reality the First and not the Fourth Power. For this reason, Ntumfor has been vehement in condemning the 'gangsters' in journalism who 'rig news' through deliberate misinformation, quite often due to financial influence.

Before proceeding to comment further on elections in Cameroon, I feel it necessary to recall a number of diabolical activities which portray the Biya regime as being anti-people, notwithstanding all the cacophony about democracy and human rights. In fact, this is genocide of an even greater dimension than the Ndu killings.



Power and the Man

2002 was another dark year in the SDF's history. Not only did the party lose half the seats it had in the previous parliament but a peace pact was signed with the Biya regime which led to the resignation of Seidou Maidadi, its first vice chairman, Evariste Foupoussi, the communications officer and other top officials. The controversy began when NEC resolved not to enter Parliament or take up seats in the newly won councils because she had been cheated in the elections.

To the embarrassment of these top officials, Fru Ndi took a unilateral decision that the new mayors and MPs should go in. Clement Ngwasiri, one of the new MPs had been sent by Fru Ndi to represent him when the SDF was blamed for the violence that rocked Bamenda. The government thought it was absurd that the SDF was protesting in Bamenda after winning all but one of the 20 seats in the Northwest. Clement Ngwasiri and Aaron Neba of the Bafut/Tubah constituency ended up signing a peace pact with the Northwest administration. When accusing fingers were pointed at Fru Ndi, he passed the buck to Ngwasiri and his colleagues who were ordered to pay the party FCFA 1m each.

The signing of the peace pact reopened old wounds. The resignation of Maidadi and the rest was the zenith of their frustration caused by a system in which the party chairman took unilateral decisions and made scapegoats of others. The deal with Sani Abacha was still fresh in his mind. Ngwasiri, who was the principal victim of the pact, was later to have his revenge when he raised hell in Parliament about Fru Ndi's bad faith in promising him the parliamentary group leadership and then breaking his promise by reappointing Mbah Ndam to the prestigious and lucrative post.

Constitutional Coup

The most decisive blow Ngwasiri ever dealt Fru Ndi was a constitutional coup d'état he carried out in 2006. The whole thing started as a joke. Clement Nforti Ngwasiri, one of SDF's founding fathers issued a declaration on 13 February 2006 announcing that the SDF National Executive Committee (NEC) was dissolved and Fru Ndi was overthrown

as party chairman. He said the SDF was supposed to hold its next convention after that in Yaoundé in 2003. Having failed to do so, the NEC had outlived its mandate and Fru Ndi by presiding over the SDF was acting illegally. Ngwasiri, a university professor, lawyer and MP for Bamenda was also the chairman of the National Advisory Council (NAC). He quoted the SDF constitution that he said gave the NAC the right to take over the management of the party if the chairman and the NEC failed. As in the case of Souleymane, an NAC and NEC meeting was also held and Ngwasiri was dismissed both as NAC chairman and as SDF militant. Fru Ndi had argued that Ngwasiri resigned as NAC chairman but the professor dismissed the allegation with the argument that he had tendered his resignation but that it was rejected by the party chairman. The proof of this was that he handed over his resignation letter and he presided over another NAC meeting with Fru Ndi present. Ngwasiri finally took the matter of the NEC and Fru Ndi's illegal status to the Mfoundi High Court in Yaoundé calling on the court to rule that the NAC was the rightful body to manage the SDF. The matter had a favourable hearing and the court passed a ruling calling on Fru Ndi and the NEC not to hold the Bamenda Convention. Confident that he had legality on his side, the professor and his supporters went ahead to schedule an SDF convention in Yaoundé, as Souleymane had done more than eight years earlier. Ngwasiri had the firm backing of Ben Muna whom Fru Ndi and his supporters had barred from contesting the SDF chairman's post with the incumbent, claiming he had since resigned from the SDF and had only recently been readmitted. Ben Muna argued that he contested elections with Fru Ndi to choose the party's candidate for the 2004 presidential elections which the SDF chairman won. This was after a reconciliation meeting at Ntamulung Church Centre in Bamenda on 8 September 2004. To Muna, it was incongruous to allow somebody to contest elections to choose a candidate for the country's top job and later consider the same individual unfit to stand for election for the chairmanship of a party in that same country.

Muna subsequently stood for election in Yaoundé 111 SDF District where he was endorsed as the candidate for the party's chairmanship. Fru Ndi and the NEC saw this as an act of gross insubordination, an anti-party activity. Muna and his supporters were subsequently dismissed from the party when they declared that they intended to attend Ngwasiri's convention in Yaoundé. As proof that they were not joking, Ngwasiri and his supporters booked the Yaoundé Conference Centre and paid the exorbitant sum of FCFA 1.5m.

The SDF hierarchy knew that if two conventions were allowed to be held, then it meant the party was in two factions. As Ben Muna later told me, Fru Ndi and his agents who had always denied any secret

dealings with the government surreptitiously pleaded with some of Biya's henchmen to frustrate the Yaoundé Convention. Gregoire Owona, vice secretary general of the CPDM Central Committee and minister delegate in charge of relations with the National Assembly and the secretary general at the presidency are said to have not only ordered the administration of the district where the conference centre is to prevent such a meeting but actually dispatched troops there to pre-empt it. Barely two days before the meeting and after Fru Ndi and his supporters had coerced the Bamenda DO to give authorization for the Bamenda Convention, I learnt that a secret meeting was held at Fru Ndi's residence. The meeting had one agenda: the disruption of the Yaoundé Convention. Mrs Margaret Nyah, a former Northwest SDF chairperson who had since decamped to Muna's side, told me she was one of those targeted for elimination. But this, she vowed, would not prevent her from fulfilling the obligation she had agreed to undertake, namely to transport delegates from Bamenda who were willing to be part of the Yaoundé Convention.

At exactly 6 am on 26 May 2006, I was aroused from slumber by a phone call from a friend, the publisher of an English language newspaper with its headquarters in Buea, capital of the Southwest Province. He asked me whether I had heard the scoop. 'No I had not,' I told him. He then proceeded to inform me that another Operation Storm Yaoundé had taken place, that the hit squad struck at night and its members were on their way back. An hour later, Walter Mudoh, an ardent Muna supporter, called and wanted to know if I had heard the breaking news. I replied negatively. 'Fru Ndi's thugs struck last night. As I am talking to you, seven corpses are lying at the SDF secretariat in Yaoundé. I can say I am fortunate to be still alive. I don't know if it is safe for me to return to Bamenda,' he said. I later learnt that only one person had been killed, Gregoire Diboule, the SDF's administrative secretary in the Centre Province where Yaoundé is situated. But though the situation was not as precarious as I had thought, the information still sent shivers down my spine. I had openly supported the right of Muna and other supporters to voice their opinions and Fru Ndi knew it. But I had decided not to attend the Yaoundé Convention because I had suspected that there would be foul play. Although not a coward, I agreed with the school of thought that martyrdom is uncalled for in journalism. That if Dele Giwa, the Nigerian journalist and publisher of *Newswatch* who was killed by a letter bomb, had been more cautious and remained alive, he would have written more and better stories than that which cost him his life. I remembered what had happened to Hilary Kebila Fokum and the RFI journalist who went to report on the Souleymane Convention. I remembered Chinua Achebe, who said that 'We sometimes stand in the compound of a coward and point to where a brave man once lived.' This is a

metaphorical way of saying that it is better to behave like a coward and stay out of trouble than play the Fearless Fang and plunge yourself in a mess. Above all, I remembered the words of Charly Ndi Chia, the editor of my newspaper, *The Post*, on the eve of the Yaoundé Convention. 'We have reporters in Yaoundé. I advise you not to go. Let us stay on the side of journalism.'

So on the day of the two conventions I was not in Yaoundé or in the Bamenda congress hall where Fru Ndi's own conference was being held. Chris Mbunwe, the Bamenda bureau chief of *The Post* was accredited to cover the convention. But I was able to get as much of the information as I needed from those who were in the hall. The story I gathered was from SDF militants who did not approve of the attack on Muna's supporters. One of them, then still an SDF MP, told me that one of those who took part in the operation had shown him a bloody club which he had used to batter the late SDF centre provincial secretary to death. Far from being remorseful or concealing the fact of their part of the hit squad, many of those who took part made no secret of it. Instead the vanguards who went for the Operation were proud of being among the valiant, most committed and faithful loyalists that the party had deemed fit and distinguished for the meritorious service of rescuing its logo from hawks, as some of them described Ngwasiri, Muna and their supporters.

This heroism lasted only as long as there was no threat of imminent danger. The moment Fru Ndi began denying that he had sent thugs to disrupt the Yaoundé Convention, fear and caution replaced pride and confidence in the hearts of the SDF chairman's myrmidons. This was after the arrest of Chi Ngafor, a retired gendarmerie colonel, who had commanded the operation to storm the party secretariat in Yaoundé. In self-defence, Fru Ndi and his supporters claimed a car knocked him down while he was running away from the secretariat. They also tried to impress on the public that those involved in the brawl that took place were Muna's supporters.

It is necessary at this juncture to recall that during Fru Ndi's campaigns against the Biya regime in the early 1990s, one of the commonly used aphorisms was that liars should have good memories.

As more facts continued to emerge about the incident, Fru Ndi and his men became contradictory in their declarations. Press reports after the incident quoted Pascal Zamboue, one of Muna's supporters, saying he knew about the operation and that he was one of those targeted for elimination. Zamboue, erstwhile SDF chairman for the Centre Province claimed he was still the incumbent since no reorganization had taken place and that was the bone of contention between him and Fru Ndi, who saw him as a usurper after the NEC had appointed a caretaker committee headed by Chi Ngafor. Zamboue in his press declarations was

categorical that he knew when the hit squad left Bamenda and when it halted at Makenene, a refreshment stop on the road to Yaoundé. Zamboue strengthened his narrative with the information that a member of the hit squad was in constant contact with him as the journey progressed.

Other press reports alleged that security operatives actually trailed one of the cars that transported the hit squad back to Bamenda to be certain that they were making no mistake. One of Fru Ndi's henchmen aggravated matters for the SDF hierarchy by accepting in a phone conversation with me that the party sent vanguards to stop the Yaoundé Convention, but not to kill anybody. Chi Ngafor himself later confessed in an interview with *The Herald* that he and those he commanded acted on instructions from the party hierarchy which was understood to mean no other person than Fru Ndi. The contradictions of Fru Ndi and his most trusted lieutenant, Hon. Mbah Ndam, only compounded matters for them as the detainees were later transferred from the gendarmerie headquarters to the dreaded Kondengui maximum security headquarters. The security forces indicated where accusing fingers pointed when they released Muna's supporters from among those arrested, thus in metaphorical language, separating the sheep from the goats. This was followed by a process of legal gymnastics in the course of which one of the detainees by the name of Jon Ngu from Momo Division died at Kondengui. His corpse was brought to Bamenda on Thursday 24 August 2006 by the same Fru Ndi who had earlier denied sending thugs to disrupt Muna's convention. The funeral motorcade led by the SDF chairman was blocked at Veterinary Junction in Bamenda by gendarmes acting on instructions from Mezam SDO, Jules Marcellin Djaga. SDF vanguards were reduced to carrying the corpse on their heads to Liberty Square.

Here, Fru Ndi, who used the occasion to brief militants on his interrogation by the state council of Mfoundi in Yaoundé interestingly still maintained that he had never sent militants to disrupt the Yaoundé Convention. 'If you didn't send anybody to Yaoundé, how come you are bringing back the corpse of somebody arrested at the scene of the attack?' was the question on many lips. Fru Ndi was actually interrogated three times by the state persecutor in Yaoundé. The electoral setback the Hon. P.C Fonso, the SDF parliamentary candidate, later suffered in the constituency from which the late Ngu hailed was attributed to the fact that six other militants from the same area were among the remaining 22 still languishing in Kondengui, although the party blamed the DO of Mbengwi for the SDF's defeat.

One other SDF militant who mustered the courage to tell Fru Ndi exactly what he was to his face was Paulinus Jua, the son of the late

Augustine Ngom Jua, the famous prime minister of West Cameroon. Just as his father dared to challenge Ahidjo by saying he too could rule Cameroon, Jua told Fru Ndi this before the May 2006 SDF convention in Bamenda. The most memorable achievement of Jua was his campaign launch in Ayaba Hotel, Bamenda when he stated unequivocally that feymen had taken the SDF hostage. Other vices plaguing the party, Jua pointed out, were corruption, nepotism, mercantilism rumour mongering, blackmail, gossip and occultism. He mentioned no names but everyone present understood who he was referring to. Even if it was not Fru Ndi, the failure of the party's chairman to check it suggested that he approved or, at least, was part of it.

The clash with his secretary general, Tazoaacha Asonganyi, and the subsequent expulsion of the man is further proof that Fru Ndi was not somebody whose ambition anybody could try to toy with. Asonganyi was first suspended on 8 October by the SDF national executive committee after he held a press conference in Yaoundé on 27 September and insinuated that Fru Ndi had dealings with the Biya regime. He was subsequently tried for anti-party activities and expelled on 28 January 2006. His disagreement with the SDF chairman had been intensified by statements like: 'The government scored a victory against the SDF when Fru Ndi received money from the regime when his wife collapsed in Yaoundé'. Asonganyi was also suspected by Fru Ndi of sympathizing with and even supporting Fru Ndi's rival, Adamu Ndam Njoya, who was chosen by the National Coalition for Reconciliation and Reconstruction formed to challenge Biya in the 2004 presidential elections. Fru Ndi later pulled out of the eight-party coalition and challenged Biya alone, obtaining 17% against Biya's 71% of the votes. The NCRR got only 4%.

But while Fru Ndi was battling to maintain his place at the top of his party, the Biya regime was also trying to cope with a series of crises sparked off by one of his own Frankenstein monsters. One of them was the university strikes that spilled over from Yaoundé to Buea. Another was the Kohtem murder controversy which implicated Doh Gah Gwanyin, the lone CPDM parliamentarian in the pro-opposition Northwest Province, in the Cameroon Tea Estate crisis that emanated from a questionable privatization deal. The three events took place within the same period. The university crisis however deserves attention first because it was more explosive and bloody than the other two.



Bloody Universities

The main reason why most dictators cling to power when they know the majority of their subjects are yearning to see their retreating back is the conviction that they can always wriggle their way out of difficult situations using force or sophisms. They believe, as Adolph Hitler did, that all they need do to make a lie sound like the truth is to repeat it loudly. When a dictator's mind has reached this advanced state of decay, he even believes the lies he himself tells.

Since the Biya regime successfully used brute force and outlandish tricks in the early 1990s to quell a student uprising at Yaoundé University, it thought these methods and not dialogue were the best way to resolve all uprisings of the same kind. The regime's methods suffered a serious setback in 2005, especially at the University of Buea, fondly called 'UB' and that was set up in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Though there had been upheavals at the university before, none of them reached the scale of the two strikes that rocked the school in 2005 and 2006. In each of these upheavals, two students were killed, both from the Northwest Province. No such thing had happened at Yaoundé University 1 where strike actions had also taken place. The declarations of the various vice chancellors that ruled the school could help to ascertain where the blame lay. This is not to say that no violent reprisals characterized strike action in Yaoundé.

The 2005 strike action at the University of Buea began on 27 April, exactly a week after a similar uprising had begun in Yaoundé. Perhaps that in Buea took a violent turn because the authorities had treated each previous student protest as a mere storm in a teacup. The students started the 2005 strike action by marching to the main road near the entrance to the university, mounting barricades using telephone call boxes and newspaper stands and thus obstructing traffic. The confrontation began when the police, who had watched the action for some time, approached and tried to stop the protesters by firing teargas.

Instead of running away, the students responded by throwing stones. When the canisters of tear gas were finished, the police were reduced to stone throwing to disperse the irate students. But because of

the numerical strength of the students, the police had to beat a retreat but not without taking a few captives. The protesters were forced to halt their actions and assume a more humble approach by going to the police post and requesting the release of their comrades. Some of them were set free but the rest were transferred to the mobile intervention unit, known in French as the GMI. This provoked an influx of students whose numbers were so overwhelming that the Southwest administration had to seek reinforcement from Douala. A water cannon soon arrived with a contingent of policemen but before they arrived on campus and succeeded in breaking the strike, the students had gone haywire destroying the staff canteen.

They then invaded the student restaurant. After gulping down all the drinks in the freezers, they mustered enough Dutch courage to attack the building housing the University of Buea administration. Before doing so, they let down the tires of some of the staff vehicles and overturned others as well as the trash can standing nearby. They also shattered the shutters on the windows. The Faculty of Arts was worst hit as the recently published results were torn off the notice board. The looting of computers and printers in offices followed. The striking students shouted slogans and carried placards condemning the vice chancellor, Dr Dorothy Njeuma, and some of her staff, 'UB is not Njeuma's house'; 'UB must change' etc.

There was an immediate reaction by the police to all the actions by the students. They hit the students with all the force they could muster and, not satisfied, broke into the students' hostels located on University Street. They seized the students' mobile phones and money and poured water on the floor and ordered students to lie on it. After giving them this VIP (Very Inferior Personality) treatment, the police bundled some of them, with bleeding arms, elbows and knees, into the police van and took them away. The police finally took control of the university campus. In a bid to enable peace to reign on campus, the university administration invited students to a crisis meeting which was attended by the governor of the Southwest Province and the SDO for Fako Division where Buea is located. Prof. Emmanuel Chia, the deputy vice chancellor of the university, disclosed that the strike began after a delegation of five from the University of Yaoundé, which was also on strike, arrived in Buea and instigated the students there. He noted that 'not even a pin was destroyed during the University of Yaoundé strike'.

Southwest Governor Thomas Ejake Mbonda spoke next and was bitter that the students did not notify his administration that they were going on strike. He equally regretted that the police never knew destruction was taking place on campus. The governor tried to whip up sympathy for the police by saying some policemen had been injured

during the confrontation with the students and five of their vans were damaged. The governor also promised that troops would be stationed at the university until peace was restored to the campus. It was also decided that the university campus would remain out of bounds from 6 pm to 6 am to all except students resident on campus.

The grievances of the students were numerous: poor study conditions, poor toilet facilities, insufficient lecture halls. The students were also angry that they were not well fed and that they paid FCFA 68,000 but less than half of this amount was used to improve the welfare of the school, and UB was the most expensive of all the state universities. 'We wanted the FCFA 50,000 school fees scrapped,' one of the student leaders complained.

Above all, the students were angry that the University of Buea was too bureaucratic and that no propitious atmosphere existed to encourage dialogue. The students poured a huge quantity of invectives on Victor Julius Ngoh, the dean of the Faculty of Arts, saying he not only held too many posts but was also the greatest obstacle to dialogue at the university.

The strike action took place when Dr Dorothy Njeuma, the vice chancellor, was away. Because of the poor manner in which it was handled, the strike degenerated and led to the killing of two students, Gilbert Nforlem and Aloysius Abouem, coincidentally both from the Northwest, the province Njeuma had always stigmatized as being the author of all the mischief at the university. Several students were wounded and property estimated at hundreds of millions of FCFA was damaged.

Another dramatic moment in the strike was the demonstration by students when the corpses of the slain students were taken out of the Buea hospital mortuary for burial in the Northwest. Protesting students were following the corpses to Mile 17 from where they were to be conveyed to their place of burial when the police brought in water cannons and there was another spate of rioting. (When two students were killed in another strike the following year, the corpses were taken out at night to avoid similar embarrassment.)

Calm only returned to the school after an accord was signed with Jacques Fame Ndong, the higher education minister, thanks to the mediating powers of Charles Mbella Moki, the mayor of Buea Council. On that occasion, Mbella Moki was literally lifted shoulder-high by the students and proclaimed 'the new governor of the Southwest Province' as a sign of protest against the reckless manner in which the administrator had handled the crisis. Mbella Moki gave the students FCFA 500,000 as a 'modest contribution' in his capacity as mayor of Buea to help ameliorate their situation.

The very fact that Fame Ndonga signed an accord with the students union, thereby recognizing it, was seen by the Vice Chancellor Dorothy Njeuma as a conspiracy against her, a stab in the back and an official sanctification of opposition to her by her sworn enemies. This explains why, far from appreciating this realistic approach taken by the higher education minister, Dorothy Njeuma was critical of the joint accord he signed with the students, saying not all its points were binding. Njeuma and her collaborators were very critical of the behaviour of students during the one-month strike that paralyzed the institution and resulted in the death of two students and a taxi driver.

The vice chancellor stated in her preliminary address that the violent student riot of 27 April was totally unprovoked. 'In broad daylight, and in complete defiance of pleas from senior officials of the university for dialogue, a group of unruly students destroyed over 20 vehicles, the staff canteen, looted food and property in the university restaurant and other structures of the campus.' The vice chancellor said they threatened to burn any students who would not join them. Njeuma said the students refused to heed advice and took their insurgency off campus and provoked a violent confrontation with the police. She said the advice she gave from Kigali, Rwanda to her collaborators at the university and to the hierarchy in Yaoundé to close the university went unheeded.

Njeuma said from the beginning that the grievances of the students were not clear. 'However, some of the inscriptions on cars, broken louvers and improvised placards could be read: No fees; we want a monthly allowance; we want free food; No French 101/102; No classes in the Lycee; Ngoh must go; Jua, we want our FASA money, etc.' She said at the initial stage of the riot that there was no overt reference to the vice chancellor, 'although it would seem that covertly, she was targeted.'

The late Chief John Mangia Ebanja, one of Njeuma's collaborators said the impression they got from the first day of the strike was that there was a group of people manipulating the students. 'What happened could not have been done without somebody leading it somehow,' he averred. He said when the strike started that the then governor of the Southwest Province, Thomas Ejake Mbonda, came on campus on 28 April and asked the students to present their problems.

'The document they sent to the governor's office was not signed because nobody claimed to be leading the strike. In that document, they asked questions that were related to student life. There was no mention of the vice chancellor. This is why we only learnt of the leader in a newspaper, three weeks afterwards,' Chief Ebanja said. 'The logical explanation for this is that people who were manipulating behind the scene could not do so indefinitely.'

When the strike started on 27 April, Registrar Herbert Endeley said as he walked around the 4000 students from the gate back to campus, 'When we met them, they had no single placard. The UB students went on strike for absolutely no reason. They invented the reason afterwards.' He said they refused to engage in dialogue, contrary to statements that it was the university authorities that shunned dialogue. 'They wanted it their way and they were advised not to go to the streets because they could be killed. They refused. Some people say they were shot with live bullets. As far as I am concerned, Goliath was killed with a stone. And so stones were just as bad as bullets.'

Endeley recalled that several policemen were wounded as a result of stones thrown by students. 'A student's life must not be valued more than anybody else's. Everybody's life is important.'

UBSU Attacked

If UB authorities berated the entire student body for what the vice chancellor considered uncouth and unruly behaviour, the University of Buea Students' Union (UBSU), led by Walters Onekon Angwere, were pelted with worse invectives. Hear Njeuma: 'UBSU is a self-proclaimed insurgent student group that would seem to have masterminded the riot and destruction of property on the university campus and in Molyko in April-May 2005'. She said UBSU was termed a self-proclaimed and illegal group because it was not among the over 31 student associations and clubs officially approved in the 2004/2005 academic year. 'Its ringleaders come from the same faculty (the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences) and the same department (political sciences). No democratic elections have ever been concluded to establish their illegality in conformity with the rules and tradition of the University of Buea.'

The vice chancellor suspected that the students were being encouraged to commit atrocities by some of the members of staff at the University of Buea, as well as individuals and groups outside the university. 'A critical look at their so-called by-laws also reveals political overtones.'

She was embittered by the attitude of the UBSU towards her, which she said was one of absolute defiance, insult, mud-slinging and character assassination, which mimicked the attitude of some teaching staff. She looked back in anger at the genesis of the UBSU which she said emerged in mid-May 2005. According to her, the UBSU gave the impression that it was dealing only with the authorities above the vice chancellor. Its leadership did not address itself to her. However, she claimed that their intensions seemed to have been to do harm to her person, hence their insistence that she should meet students off-campus in a mob whose composition could not be determined.' She said the

students had gone as far as writing to the head of state, Paul Biya, 'giving him instructions and imposing demands such as cancelling fees, the institution of allowance to students...'

Njeuma said the UBSU went as far as writing to heads of departments, asking them to collect FCFA 2000 from every student at the beginning of the academic year. 'These are people who are asking the government to cancel registration fees, yet they want to tax the students.'

Endeley saw the behaviour of the students as outrageous, saying he did not know anywhere on earth where students tell the administrators how a school should be run. 'Unfortunately, no member of the so-called UBSU is older than any member of staff this institution.'

In his intervention, Prof. Emmanuel Chia, deputy vice chancellor in charge of research and cooperation, said the UBSU the students wanted to impose on the university was not a better structure than the one the UB already had. 'We have faculty associations elected by students. In these associations, we have faculty executives.' Chia said the presidents should elect a president of presidents out of the associations. This, he argued, was to ensure that every faculty was equitably represented, failing which the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences could easily grab all the positions in the UBSU. 'The UBSU has to review its constitution to take into consideration the minority faculties. What the UBSU has submitted so far, does not, in my opinion, meet full representation.'

Other members of the Buea University administration who spoke on that occasion were equally critical of the conduct of the students during the strike action. Njeumas, it should be noted, later attacked lecturers and parents of students in the university, accusing them of masterminding the strike action. The occasion was the visit of Fame Ndong, the minister of higher education to the school. In her blunt and virulent speech, she said the university had been turned upside down by some of the parents in complicity with some of the teachers. The vice chancellor was, however, harder on the students for rejecting dialogue with her, destroying property and presenting their grievances in a disorderly manner, acts which she said should be condemned. The vice chancellor ended by saying the obvious: that she must one day leave the UB because people come and go but that institutions remain.

It is worth recalling that Njeuma, a former vice minister of national education, was responsible for student uprisings in 1983 and 1984. She had connived with her boss, Rene Ze Nguele, a Francophone, to bastardize the GCE examinations and later gone round the country threatening with dismissal all the principals of secondary and high schools who refused to apply the new format. 'Leave the GCE alone' was the general cry that began at the end of 1983 in the University of Yaoundé when I was in my first year there. The Biya regime was forced to

capitulate in the face of unanimous Anglophone rejection of the new GCE format which, if applied, would be achieved through nothing short of a miracle.

When she was appointed the pioneer vice chancellor of the university she demonstrated commendable maternal qualities and was actually called 'Mother' but the passage of time (the Great Manufacture, according to Charles Dickens) replaced the sentimental of realistic and blind obedience with a liberal spirit which Njeuma, a conservative, found difficult to stomach. She became increasingly uncomfortable with even the slightest iota of critical observation. She masterminded the sacking of Ndiva Mbua, a lecturer at the University of Buea for the 'crime' of adherence to the SDF party. Smidt Soltau, a German anthropologist, saw his exchange programme mission to UB shortened because Njeuma could no longer bear critical remarks about her administration. She was particularly vexed by the lecturers' critical remarks about her 'wall of ignorance' which she built around the university, reducing it to a 'glorified secondary school' in the words of late Professor Bernard Fonlon, a renowned intellectual. With time the students became less and less inclined to the appellation of 'Mother' which they gave her at the beginning and saw in her an academic Okonkwo, using a machete to cut down the helpless student Ikemefunas that sought her protection. As proof of how stubborn she could be, Njeuma snubbed even a commission which Biya had set up to investigate the happenings in the six state universities. *The Guardian Post*, a renowned Anglophone newspaper, described her as an autocrat in its edition No. 0178 of Monday 12 September 2005. Njema, the paper stated, lacked tact in handling the aftermath of the 2005 student strike.

With her unsympathetic attitude towards the two students shot, Njeuma portrayed herself as no different from the bloodthirsty Commissioner Mefire, who shot and killed two students during one of the strikes and was promoted for the act. Njeuma's transfer to the prestigious University of Yaoundé was seen as promotion and not sanction for the macabre events at the University of Buea. Her departure from the university was welcomed by the student population but it did not solve the problems at the university.

More Blood Letting

On 27 November 2006, a little more than eighteen months after the last strike action, the University of Buea did what the mountain in that vicinity does each time pressure reaches its summit. It erupted again: the cause this time was the imposition of a list of candidates who the students were convinced had not sat the entrance examination into the university's Faculty of Health Sciences.

The story goes that 876 candidates sat the entrance examination to select candidates for the faculty. The GCE Board, which corrected the scripts using its selection system, declared 127 candidates successful and therefore qualified to proceed to the oral part of the exam billed for Monday 23 November 2000 to select 60 of them for the medical faculty. To the discomfiture of UB authorities and staff, a list of 153 candidates was faxed to the Faculty of Health Sciences. This meant 26 names of persons who never took part in the exams had been added to the list of successful candidates. On 22 November several phone calls from Yaoundé demanded that the orals, which should have taken place the next day, Thursday 23 November, be put back to Monday 27 November. The jury that sat the next day was embarrassed when instructions from the university's hierarchy announced the postponement. This decision was viewed by the jury members as completely at variance with the principles and values of a university. It was thought that the vice chancellor, Professor Cornelius Lambi and collaborators had, for selfish reasons, decided to compromise the time-honoured principle of meritocracy underlying competitive examinations. But it turned out that Lambi was a victim of circumstances and that the decision came through the collaboration of two top Beti officials in the ministry of higher education, Marcelline Nnomo and Norbert Ndong.

The students began their strike action by erecting a barricade in the Molyko neighbourhood. Students of a local secondary school (Government Bilingual High School, Molyko) joined in. The arrival of the police and gendarmerie added embers to an already raging fire. Gendarmes said they had been instructed to ensure no gathering of students took place. But this turned out to be a Herculean task as students regrouped with lightning speed each time they were dispersed and mounted more barricades along Buea's lone dual carriageway. The confrontations became even more violent on Tuesday, with students burning nearly a dozen cars, most of them belonging to the university. About 30 protesters were arrested. The climax was the killing of two students, Ufeanei Abiandong, and Moma Bennet Kenyufon, on Wednesday 30 November 2006. The university authorities had to summon staff and protesters to an emergency meeting that Wednesday in order to look into the students' grievances. No solution was arrived at and the standoff continued between the student population and the security forces that not only looted student property but went on a raping spree.

Embarrassed by the killings, the president of the jury handling the exams, Marceline Nnomo, also inspector general at the ministry of higher education and Norbert Ndong, the director of higher education, blamed UB Vice Chancellor Cornelius Lambi, saying he violated the rule

of regional balance that governs the conduct of public exams by not respecting the principle of regional balance and publishing the results of the entrance examination into the UB medical school without allowing the ministry of higher education to vet them.

The argument about regional balance was dismissed by most Anglophones on the grounds that the Beti tribe alone with less than 15% of Cameroon's population occupied more than 50% of the country's lucrative posts, including the major ministerial portfolios, and that the six most influential posts in government were no-go areas for Anglophones and the ministries were the preserve of Francophones.

Lambi for his part apologized for the 'error' saying that since the students would have to be employed by the government after graduation, he should have allowed the ministry of higher education to supervise every stage of the process. He, however, took everyone aback by claiming that the striking students had a hidden agenda, that many of them entered the university fraudulently and that the strike took place while the university authorities were investigating the fraud. Lambi also accused some of the strikers of obtaining more credits than they deserved in order to succeed in their courses, using the same fraudulent means.

The vice chancellor's apology was a desperate move to save his job but it had the reverse effect. Just as the confessions of crime suspects are used to sentence them, Lambi's apology was seen as an admission of guilt and was used to fire him soon after calm returned to the university. He was replaced by Vincent Titanji, another Northwesterner.

The Strike Pays Off

The two-week long University of Buea student strike action seemingly paid off with UB authorities conceding to eight out of their nine demands during negotiations on Saturday 30 December. Both the student leaders and the university administration brokered a deal that granted immunity to the students and agreed to commence classes on Wednesday 3 January. The university administration with the help of the regional secretary of the Human Rights Commission, Christopher Tambe Tiku, had managed to get the student leaders to agree to a peace deal and to call off the strike.

Tambe Tiku, who masterminded the negotiations, told *The Post* that the university had agreed to reduce fees in all degree programmes in the university to FCFA 50,000, while those who had paid more than this amount for postgraduate programmes would be refunded the balance. He also revealed that UB authorities would offer transcripts to students free of charge except if they requested for an extra transcript, in which case, would they be required to pay FCFA 1000.

The human rights secretary admitted that the students had scored

a major victory in the strike action and he could not afford to see them lose it, so he had to help them through the negotiations. One of the student leaders, Donatus Wan-Obi, disclosed on Thursday that the administration has offered the student union an office that it was in the process of equipping. He admitted that fees had been maintained at FCFA 50,000 and that those who had paid FCFA 5,000 as penalty for the late payment of fees would be refunded their money. Wan-Obi also disclosed that the administration had tabled a request for findings into the deaths of two University of Buea students during the 2005 strike action. He denied claims that the administration had given them money but said it had offered to sponsor the activities of UBSU as long as they presented their calendar of activities. 'We have requested the university sponsor the student elections, which are coming up soon,' Wan-Obi said. Classes however resumed on Wednesday 3 January although classrooms were not full. The new vice chancellor, Prof. Vincent Pryde Kehdingha Titanji, cautioned students to avoid being used by third parties for undeclared aims. Titanji was speaking during the installation of some university administrators appointed the previous December following certain changes within the university. 'The main pre-occupation of students in a university milieu should be to make their career. Please remain focused on that. Our students constitute a precious resource and the *raison d'être* of our action,' the VC said.

Titanji assured the students of the 'availability of his administration and readiness to teach them all the skills they need to be good citizens'. He said they were bound by the dictates of communal life to live and work together as a community; students, teaching staff, support staff and the community hosting the university. It must, however, be admitted that the destruction that characterized strikes in Buea made violent confrontations with security forces inevitable but the security forces did not demonstrate any tact in dealing with the students. The remark by one of the students' critics, a lecturer, during a crisis management meeting that David killed Goliath with a stone made sense. But what are the helmets police wear and the shield they hold meant for if not to protect them against such missiles. That nobody was killed at the University of Yaoundé 1 during a strike there on 30 November 2006 could be explained on the grounds that no destruction took place there. The police, however, attacked many of the students using rubber truncheons and arrested Djontu Mouaffo, the president of the Association for the Defence of Students' Rights (ADDEC). The wrath of the students was enkindled by a decision signed by Njeuma, their rector, instituting 7 December 2006 for the payment of school fees with a warning that students who failed to meet the deadline would have no access to laboratories and tutorial classes. According to ADDEC,

gendarmes provoked the situation by disrupting the association's meeting intended to take a position on the rector's decision. After they were dispersed, the students became wounded lions warning Njeuma that she should retreat as they were coming. ADDEC's leadership called on fellow students not to pay the stipulated fee and questioning the university administration about what it had done with the billions that had been collected as fees from students.

The students were also vexed that the university authorities maintained a conspiratorial silence when landlords in the various residential areas raised the amount they paid as rent. Cameroonian universities today are enjoying some calm but only after the students made the authorities understand that they were not kindergarten kids.



Hunter Hunted

One of the most scathing criticisms often levelled against the Biya regime is that the executive lords over the judiciary and the legislature. This is particularly true in the case of the Supreme Court whose president, Alexis Dipanda Mouelle, confessed in 1992 that the numerous irregularities in that year's elections were enough to necessitate cancellation, but that his hands were tied. While presenting the results to President Biya a few days later, Dipanda Mouelle pleaded with the head of state to grant the long-awaited independence of the judiciary as soon as possible.

The subservience of Parliament to Biya is eloquent proof of the executive's continuous stranglehold on the legislature. Concerning the courts, it can however be admitted that while Biya's grip on power is not in danger, the judiciary is relatively free. Magistrates and other law enforcement officials who claim their hands are tied in ordinary criminal matters are certainly very dishonest persons who want to use judicial lack of independence as a justification for arbitrary and egoistic exploits. Such judicial officials are often persecutors rather than prosecutors. The manner in which the Cameroonian judiciary functions has already been illustrated by the SCNC detainees' trial in which the judges were more the persecutors than the prosecutors. But as with every rule, there is usually an exception and the principles of objectivity oblige us to show the opposite.

On 20 August 2004 the governor of the Northwest Province, Koumpa Isa, convened a meeting of the elite and stakeholders in the electoral process. The venue of the meeting was Ndog, the administrative headquarters of Ngoketunjia Division. During the period of questions and suggestions that normally follows the address of a keynote speaker, John Kohtem, SDF district chairman for Balikumba, complained that Fon Doh, the traditional ruler who was also a CPDM MP and mayor, was using his position to manipulate the electoral register and include the names of minors, among other electoral malpractices. Fon Doh was so vexed by this direct affront that he told Kohtem he was a lion and nobody challenges a lion and gets away with it.

Although Kohtem drew the governor's attention to this threat on his life, Koumpa Isa saw it only as the outburst of pent-up emotions that was normal among politicians who embrace opposite ends of an argument and so did nothing to protect the complainant. At 5:30 pm that same day Kohtem was found dead at the Balikumbat Small Market after allegedly being pursued and severely beaten. News of Kohtem's death was received with shock by Cameroonians and international human rights groups. The SDF made political capital of it and paraded Kohtem's corpse along Bamenda's Commercial Avenue. The demonstration culminated in a rally at Liberty Square, considered sacred by the SDF because of the death of its six militants on 26 May 1990, the date of the party's launch.

During the rally, attended by Adamou Ndam Njoya and other opposition figures, Fru Ndi promised fireworks if Fon Doh was not immediately arrested, tried and sanctioned. There was much sympathy and support for Kohtem because he was lame and therefore considered helpless. Despite this threat and pressure from human rights groups and even Northwest CPDM barons, suspects in the murder case's preliminary inquiry only began in June 2005, ten months later. Fon Doh and 11 other suspects underwent a grilling in the premises of the Ndop legal department. The panel that did the interrogation was led by Paul Evande Mwambo, one of the attorney general's assistants. Justice Evande was generally known to be daring, incorruptible and one who could never call a spade by another name. The lifting of Fon Doh's immunity by Parliament was the first indication that the trial would be fair. It is noteworthy that this was the first time MPs of both the ruling party and the opposition acted in unison on an important issue. The CPDM MP acted this way because they knew that their party leader, President Biya, wanted it and had instructed the vice prime minister in charge of justice to tell them so.

This notwithstanding, Kohtem's supporters still thronged the legal department grounds when a report in *The Post*, written by myself, disclosed that the verdict of the preliminary inquiry would be made public on 23 November. Kohtem sympathizers, most of them SDF supporters, threatened hell if Fon Doh were not punished. These included Pius Lecigah, Balikumbat district chairman who had been unanimously elected to replace Kohtem, and Immaculate Vakunseh, Kohtem's younger sister who was, incidentally, Fon Doh's wife. Vakunseh told all those who cared to listen that her husband had confessed to her that he beat Kohtem but that he didn't know this would occasion death. She told me in the presence of judicial officials that she had already conducted her own trial of Fon Doh and found him guilty. That verdict was not subject to any appeal and was entirely independent of what the court would

subsequently declare.

Vakunseh had left Fon Doh's Balikumbat Palace soon after her husband's alleged confession, declaring their marriage dissolved despite the fact that they had four children. Also present in the legal department grounds were Fon Doh's supporters, ferried there by him to protect him against any possible acts of aggression from Kohtem supporters.

The noise and the threats from Kohtem's supporters angered the judge who said he was not prepared to be intimidated or blackmailed into delivering the ruling. He shifted the ruling to 30 November then to 20 December 2005 when the threats from Kohtem sympathizers persisted. He finally delivered it on 10 January 2006. The ruling which Kohtem's sympathizers received with glee was that Fon Doh and the other 11 suspects had a case to answer, meaning that the investigations and inquiry had revealed their implication in the murder.

The trial of Fon Doh began on 30 January at Ndop High Court. During the trial, 23 witnesses testified, the majority of them against Fon Doh. The courtroom was always full, sometimes even before the hearing began, forcing most of the curious observers who came to follow proceedings from the windows.

The trial was characterized by drama, the principal actors of which were the lawyers. Fon Doh's defence lawyers, led by Barrister Anthony Amaze, were very jittery and often confrontational in their approach because they knew they had a bad case. One of the most memorable court scenes was that in which one of Fon Doh's lawyers claimed that there had been an assassination attempt on his client by SDF supporters. But the account was unconvincing. The lawyer claimed that the assassins went up to the palace at around 3 am and opened fire, wounding a dog in the process and that they escaped when Fon Doh's palace guards retaliated. The lawyer could not explain why the gendarmes who have a brigade in Balikumbat were not called to arrest the supposed assassins. How did the assassins get to the top of the plateau where the palace is found if the road leading to it was so steep, and at such an ungodly time of night?

Fon Doh's lawyers also claimed that their client implicated himself in the original statements he made to the gendarmes because he never understood the French language. This claim was scandalous to those who had heard Fon Doh only two months earlier granting an interview to a CRTV journalist in impeccable French. I came close to exchanging blows with lawyer Amaze in the Ndop High Court premises for publishing an article in *The Post* in which I pointed out all these fallacies.

The verdict pronounced by Justice Damian Ambe of the Bamenda Court of Appeal declared Fon Doh and his fellow suspects

guilty of murdering Kohtem and sentenced them to 15 years imprisonment each and a fine of FCFA 500,000 (or they could serve a extra one year in jail). The judgement was preceded by graphic details of how the killing took place. The verdict was received with applause by a majority of Cameroonians and human rights groups who not only hailed Justice Ambe as a Daniel come to judgment, but also Justice Beatrice Tayong, President of Ndop High Court, Justice Mokube of Nkambe High Court and James Ngwene, the Ndop State Counsel.

Intrigue

But while Cameroonians were still rejoicing that for once a crony of the regime had been sanctioned for his excesses, the Northwest Court of Appeal released Fon Doh on bail after he had served only four months of his 15-year jail term, on the pretext that he was ill. Before then, he had been admitted to Bamenda provincial hospital. His medical report, which I saw, actually indicated that he was a diabetic and was suffering from hypertension but there was no proof that his condition had become so critical as to justify his release on bail for so grievous a crime as murder. The pronouncement that he would be set free on bail was made on Friday 18 August 2006 during a heated appeal court session after which the presiding judge, Justice Henry Morfaw, suffered malaise, which rumour mongers attributed to witchcraft. Even on 21 August, before the official date when he was to leave the hospital. Fon Doh was already out. His release had been objected to by Ignatius Sama Juma, Emmanuel Banmi, Bernard Nwana, all the Balikumbat elite and CPDM barons. Pius Lecigah had joined them to enlist the services of Francis Sama, a pro-SDF counsel. Their argument was that a freed Fon Doh was a threat to peace in Balikumbat.

Angry demonstrations in Balikumbat were the reaction to the news. One of Fon Doh's cars parked in a garage was burnt by demonstrators, some of whom went as far as threatening to lynch him the fate of Fon Simon Vugar, a traditional ruler of Babanki, a village about 20 km from Bamenda.

Fon Doh had many more surprises for his opponents. He returned to Balikumbat in spite of the threats and was later maintained as CPDM secretary by his party, the CPDM, amidst protests from Joseph Mbah Ndam, SDF parliamentary group leaders Emmanuel Yoyo and other outspoken SDF members. But the greatest embarrassment was a pronouncement by the vice prime minister in charge of justice, Amadou Ali, who said Fon Doh was no longer a convict from the moment he appealed the Ndop High Court's judgment. He was replying to a question from Hon. Yoyo about why Fon Doh had been allowed to return to Parliament even though he had been convicted of murder.

Amadou Ali's declaration was vexing enough to hit the headlines in the papers. But Fon Doh was the main author of the humiliation he later had when he returned to Parliament. In a bid to impress on supporters that he was in the good books of President Biya, Fon Doh behaved like the proverbial cricket that stands on a hill inviting death. During the presentation of New Year wishes to Biya, Fon Doh reportedly went and greeted the president. The moment Biya saw him, his face was distorted by anger. He is said to have scolded Justice Minister Ahmadou Ali who was also present and later given firm instructions to ensure that the royal fugitive returned to prison, his rightful abode. Biya is also reported to have ordered that Fon Doh was not only given his marching orders by Parliament but he was also told never to set foot in Yaoundé again, according to press reports.

Fon Doh really began to consume once more the bread of sorrow when the national assembly speaker not only ordered him out of Parliament but a gendarme was sent to ensure that he had actually left parliamentary premises. But Fon Doh didn't give up. He had the temerity to order the humiliation of a rival traditional ruler, Doh Gah Nyamgi 111, whom his enemies had crowned soon after he left prison. Both Fons had been barred from public occasions by Vincent Mbita, the Balikumbat DO. However, on 11 February 2007, Fon Doh and his followers went and sat in the Balikumbat grandstand.

When supporters of Doh Gah Nyamgi saw him, they went back and invited his rival to come and sit in the same grandstand. But Fon Doh proved himself the lion he was by ordering his supporters to seize and burn his rival's mat and stool. Fon Nyamgi's 'royal' cap was also seized from his head and used to feed the hungry flame. After this, followers were severely beaten and sent away.

The mother of all surprises was that Fon Doh was able to obtain a certificate of non-conviction, contest election primaries in Balikumbat on 5 May 2007 and win. His political ambition however suffered a setback when the CPDM's investiture committee rejected his candidature. Stage-managed protests by his follower on Wednesday 30 May 2007 failed to force a reversal of the situation. From that moment onwards, his political fate was sealed. He presented Sixtus Gabsah, one of his stooges who never took part in parliamentary primaries, as his political successor. But Emmanuel Banmi, the runner-up in the primaries, stood his ground and was subsequently invested and later chosen to represent Balikumbat in Parliament. Though his political career is from all indications finished, the fact that Fon Doh is still at liberty remains a source of worry to a majority of Cameroonians and other lovers of justice who are firmly convinced that the best place for someone convicted of murder is a maximum security prison.



The Phenomenon Called Baba Danpullo

In his play *Major Barbara*, Bernard Shaw emphasizes the centuries-old concept that whoever has money has everything, by making the millionaire Andrew Undershaft declare that poverty is a crime. He carries the idea forward by presenting the helplessness of Barbara's church (The Salvation Army) before Undershaft, who made his millions from the sale of arms, and another millionaire who got rich from the manufacture of whisky, another weapon of mass destruction. Soame Jenyns, an English philosophical writer had earlier hinted at this point in his essay 'A Free Inquiry into the Origin and Nature of Evil'.

Modern political analysts have improved on this generally accepted principle by arguing that after acquiring wealth, the next most logical thing to do is to seek political power, either for the love of fame or as a means of protecting the wealth one has acquired. In Cameroon, the urge to protect acquired wealth is preponderant because the regime in place is firmly convinced, as the Americans are regarding the war on terror, that you are either with them or against them. The Biya regime has, however, carried this principle too far by not only concluding that any businessman who does not belong to the ruling party must be using his wealth to sponsor the opposition, and ensuring that such a person is destroyed economically through taxes. This explains why, despite Cameroon's enormous resources, including manpower, foreign investors are scared to establish in the country. Perhaps the first Cameroonian to have first fully understood this vindictive principle of the party in power is Alhadji Baba Danpullo.

Who is Danpullo?

Baba Danpullo was born around 1947 which means at the time of writing he is about 60. His father, Ahmadou Danpullo, was a cattle grazier from Kano in northern Nigeria who found the Kom clan in the Northwest Province the most conducive place to settle. The hospitality of Fon Ndzie, the Kom traditional ruler at the time helped Ahmadou Danpullo to realize his dream by offering him a piece of land at Fujua, a stone's throw from Laikom, the royal seat of Kom in Fundong, Kom's

administrative headquarters.

As further proof of his love and esteem for Danpullo, Fon Ndzie gave him (the grazier was already a husband of three wives) the pretty girl Ngoin Felai as his wife. Unlike what many ignoramuses in Kom say, the pretty young lady was not a princess of the Kom Fondom but hailed from Mejang, still in Kom and was handed over to Fon Ndzie by her own father alongside other children as 'the Fon's people'. (It was the custom in those days for subjects who wanted to prove their loyalty or attachment to the palace to give a family member to the Fon.)

As Danpullo's cattle multiplied, his grazing land became inadequate to provide for them. The encroachment of land became inevitable. To prevent clashes with local farmers, the Fon of Kom gave his son-in-law another and much bigger piece of land at Ndawara close to the border with Babungo Village in Ngoketunjia Division. There he settled alongside some Mbororos. Their common occupation was cattle rearing and, given the importance of land space to persons of this profession, it was impossible for any of them to love his grazier neighbour as himself.

Amadou Danpullo had 9 children by Ngoin Felai who, after her marriage to him, converted to Islam and bore the reverential name 'Na Hajia'. Baba Danpullo was the eldest of the nine, two of whom are said to have passed away in infancy. While there, one of Baba's uncles came from Kano and, impressed by his conduct, took him to Kano with the intention of bringing him up as a businessman. An outbreak of chickenpox that affected Baba put an end to the young businessman's apprenticeship as his father sent one of his aides to bring him back.

His father did not think all the children of a grazier should belong to the same profession so decided to send him to learn driving. Before his death, Amadou Danpullo, who owned thousands of cattle, shared them out among his children. For some unexplained reason but probably because he had already been trained for another profession, Baba Danpullo had the least. Rather than spend valuable time protesting, Danpullo expeditiously sold some of the cattle and bought a vehicle which he personally drove.

When it became apparent that making money this way was slow, however hard he worked, he accepted the offer by Alhadji Nasiru, another Nigerian businessman in northern Nigeria and became a driver of one of his (Nasiru's) trucks. Danpullo used the truck to transport tea, rice, sugar and flour to Chad and Central Africa. Believing like most pragmatists that nobody can ever be great through being another's employee, Baba Danpullo decided to star his own business in the same items. To put an end to a narrative that may be fascinating to his admirers but boring to others, it suffices to indicate that he soon owned a bread

factory, popularly known as Boulangerie, a store and later became an international businessman. He made enough money to build a house for himself, then another for his mother who is still alive in Douala. El Hadj Lawan Bako, a cousin of Baba's told me that those who wish to meet a Cameroonian version of Mother Teresa of Calcutta or Indira Ghandi of India should go and visit Mami Felai, Baba's mother in Douala.

Danpullo and the Mbororos

While Baba Danpullo is an exemplary son to his mother and an excellent brother, he is anything but a saint in the Mbororo community either in Ndawara where he resides, albeit temporally, or in Sabga where there is a much larger Mbororo community. Baba, who is said to be a younger edition of his father, is a bulldozer who is ready to crush all obstacles in his way. It is also said that he used his influence as a member of the central committee of the ruling CPDM to secure a certificate for land that can contain over sixteen thousand head of cattle and two thousand horses, as well as rare birds like ostriches and peacocks. Today, most of the cattle have been sent to graze in Esu in Menchum Division, and the land has been converted into a tea estate.

The Mbororos, who tried to fight back claiming he had seized their land, found Danpullo, a more formidable force than they expected. Stories abound that he ordered the lashing of Ardos, Mbororo traditional rulers who disobeyed him, and that he converted some of the numerous rooms in his castle at Ndawa – a magnificent structure with 16 parlours where the most recalcitrant were detained. It is alleged that many Mbororos who tried to fight him and failed went into exile and others terminated their stay on earth.

These may be rumours, which like stories of their kind are blown out of all proportion. What, however, is a fact is that with his huge wealth and political influence, he has used the administration and security forces to suppress all agitation against him. He recently demonstrated this following the death of Ahmadou Sabga, the Lamido or the second-class Mbororo chief of Sabga in Mezam Division of the Northwest Province, who died on 13 July 2007.

According to the story, Mbororo kingmakers in their vast majority chose Adamu Buba as his successor arguing that Abdulaye Mamuda Sabga, son of the late lamido, had been away for fifty years and not contributed to the development of the area. But Baba Ahmadou was determined that no one other than Mamuda Sabga would be the new Lamidu. Acting obviously on his instructions, the Mezam administration had ordered the sealing of the Lamidat (Palace of the Lamido) when the Mbororos tried to install the legitimate Mbororo traditional ruler, Adamou Bouba. Many Mbororos seethed with anger when they learnt

that Baba Danpullo had said, sun come rain Mamouda Sabga. the illegitimate Lamido would be installed. The youths set up a barricade along the Bamenda-Ndop road to prevent the movement to Sabga of the administration and security forces. On arrival, the gendarmes dispersed the defenders of the barricade with teargas.

At Sabga, Mbororo women blocked the entrance to the Lamidat but the gendarmes forcefully dispersed them. The gendarmes in the process of dispersing protesters killed a horse and injured some persons. Some of the children fainted because of the suffocating influence of the teargas, scores of protesters were arrested and detained at the gendarmerie legion in Bamenda. The justification for the installation of the 'illegitimate' Lamido Mamuda Sabga, which was reportedly done thanks to Yaya Mohammad Gabdo of Banyo with the backing of the Mezam administration, was that he was the only person who applied for the post. But Mbororo people in their vast majority said it was their right to choose the person that should govern them and not the administration's. Gendarmes stayed in Sabga after the installation to preempt trouble, confirming that Mamuda Sabga was the choice of the administration and not that of the Mbororo people. The Mezam administration had been absent from the ceremony because they could no longer rely on the Mezam administration. Dozens of Mbororo people considered no place safer than a foreign embassy. The US embassy in Yaoundé was considered better than any other, obviously because of the avowed support for the freedom of all persons by Americans. At the US embassy they were received by Tad Brown, the chief of political and economic affairs.

The conduct of Baba Danpullo was deplored by the Union of Northwest Human Rights Organisations (UNOWHURO), which organized a press conference on the issue that took place at the headquarters of the Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA). Joseph Chongsi Ayeah, the chairman of the organization, warned of the threat to peace posed by the impunity of Danpullo and his supporters. Public anger against Danpullo did little to dampen Danpullo's determination to act as the overlord of the Mbororo/Fulani/Hausa community. On Sunday 9 December 2007, the Northwest Ardo Union (NWAU) was formed thanks to Baba's influence at Bamenda Congress Hall.

His puppet Lamido makes it no secret that he is Danpullo's property. He told me when I interviewed him on the Sabga crisis, 'Go to Alhadji Baba. He will grant you an interview. He will even give you money.'

During the Sunday meeting in December, he surprisingly called for unity while other Baba's bootlickers spent all their time damning the

Mbororo Social, Cultural and Development Association (MBOSCUDA) and heaping encomiums on Baba Danpullo. The meeting did however achieve one thing. A representative of Mbororo women drew the attention of the public to the plight of Mbororo women. The presenter lamented the fact that Mbororo women had no voice, they owned no property and were deprived of education. Their parents see them as suitable only as housewives and they are sent into early marriage, quite often to men old enough to be their grandfathers. She called on Cameroonians and the international community to intervene and rescue Mbororo women. Bouba Ahmadou Jalo, an official of the pro-Danpullo socio-business enterprise known by its French acronym SODELCO presented an informative paper on the background of the Mbororo community in Cameroon.

Danpullo and the CTE Crisis

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Baba Danpullo is someone who knows that with political power, everything is possible economically. Although he might not have read political science, he applies with surprising precision Kwame Nkrumah's political philosophy 'Seek ye first the political kingdom and everything else will follow'. Even his greatest detractors believe he deals directly with the head of state himself and stories have been peddled that in his early years as president, Biya spent some of his weekends at Ndawara.

Besides being a member of the CPDM central committee, Baba has reportedly doled out larger sums of money than any of his business colleagues in the Northwest for the upkeep of the party in Cameroon. A man from whom even the Ahidjo regime benefited economically, can tell every political upstart who tries to impress him with high connections 'Ahidjo I knew. Biya I know. Who are you?' That is why Danpullo was able to defy a prime ministerial order during the Sabga crisis and get away with it. Nobody else in Cameroon could do that.

Danpullo proved just how formidable he can be in 2002 when he bought the tea sector of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), considered by many economic analysts as the most lucrative part of that rich enterprise. The story goes as follows.

When the Biya regime announced its intention to privatize major state corporations, Baba hit on the idea of buying just the tea sector of the CDC. Though a man with high business acumen, he knew that to clinch such a deal he had, like Samuel Becket's Pozzo in the play *Waiting for Godot*, to enlist the services of an expert to do the thinking for him. Thanks to his business connections in South Africa, he was able to find Derrick Garvey who had floated a company called Brobon Finex. Garvey knew that the most suitable person to contact was one who knew the

CDC inside out and nobody was more suitable than John Niba Ngu who had once been its manager. Thinking is doing just as seeing is believing, seemingly goes Baba's philosophy. Garvey came to Cameroon and through Baba's guidance, got in touch with John Niba Ngu, a former agricultural minister and general manager of PAMOL the palm-oil sector of the CDC. Niba Ngu helped with negotiations and on 18 August 2002 the tea sector of the CDC, which comprised plantations in Tole in the Southwest Province, Ndu in the Northwest and Djutitsa in the West Province, was sold for a mere FCFA 1.5 billion. According to the arrangement, the CTE, as the tea sector was now christened, was to have 60% of the total shares, the state 10% and the workers 5%, while the rest were reserved for private shareholders. The state was represented in the deal by Meva'a M'Eboutou, a former finance minister. Present at the signing ceremony were Baba Danpullo and the ministers of agriculture, as well as the minister of labour and social security.

The CTE inherited a debt of over FCFA 1 billion. As his reward, Baba later said, he paid Niba Ngu FCFA 180 million and as a further sign of gratitude, appointed him CTE general manager with a mouth-watering salary of FCFA 2 million a month. As the new boss of the tea sector, Baba set up the headquarters of the CTE in Douala and moved all the equipment and other valuables there. As part of the deal, Baba had accepted that he would continue the CDC policy of buying tea from smallholders. Private tea cultivators around Tole are said to have also agreed to extend their tea farms.

Things apparently went well for some time between Baba and the workers until the CTE proprietor (who later threw off the cover of Brobon Finex and acted as chairman of the board of directors) realized that he was not making the profit he deserved or had expected. The reason for this was not hard to find. Most of the workers did little work during the normal tea-harvesting period from morning to noon, thus necessitating overtime. Baba realized that more money was paid for overtime than for normal work and decided to check this. That was the beginning of the trouble with the workers.

At management level, things were no better. Niba Ngu, whose expertise had contributed most to the concretization of the deal, was soon sacked on allegations of 'incompetence and doubtful conduct'. But the real reason was that Niba Ngu had tried to impress on the proprietor that he was a shareholder in the CTE and his appointment as general manager was part of the privatization deal. In a desperate bid to regain his post or get compensation, the sacked CTE general manager dragged Brobon Finex and the Cameroon government to the Arbitration Court of the International Chamber in 2004. He constituted his case file registered as No. 13337 on claims that he was cheated of his 5% share capital during

the privatization exercise by the government with the complicity of Baba Danpullo. During the hearing, Cameroon government lawyers denied ever negotiating with Niba Ngu whom it claimed was treated as a CTE employee, nothing else.

Concerning the CTE former general manager's demand for compensation, the defence lawyers argued that Niba Ngu was appointed to that lucrative post only as a measure of goodwill and so were under no obligation to pay him off after stripping him of his post. They further told the court that the former CTE manager was only a facilitator in the deal. After a legal battle that lasted close to three years, the Arbitration Court ruled in favour of the defendants. Niba Ngu demanded the staggering sum of FCFA 6.9 billion as compensation.

Bloody Confrontations

Baba Danpullo's victory in his legal battle with Niba Ngu was important to Danpullo in the sense that it came to assuage his feelings following clashes with protesting tea workers which left two persons dead and several wounded, as well as the destruction of millions of his tea seedlings in Santa in 2006.

The most dramatic of the workers' strikes were those that led to the hostage taking of the CDC headquarters in Bota and the killings of protesting workers in Ndu. During the siege on the CDC headquarters on Wednesday 26 July 2007, irate workers said they had a memorandum addressed to CDC general manager, Henry Njalla Quan, requesting the payment of their terminal dues which were supposed to have been given them before privatization. The representatives of the 3500 Tole tea workers demanded FCFA 2.3 billion. The angry workers rejected mediation by the governor of the Southwest Province.

On 28 August 2006, Ndu workers also went into the streets demanding their dues. As in Tole, Ndu workers were brutalized by gendarmes from Kumbo and soldiers from the 62nd military battalion in Nkambe, the headquarters of Donga-Mantung Division. Four people were wounded in the Ndu uprising, while in Tole a businessman was also shot. The climax of the agitation in Ndu was the death of two people in Ndu. Felix Njini, a 40-year-old worker, was shot by a gendarme alongside three others on 1 December 2006.

Fai Ngah Njamnsi, another victim, was a Ndu tea factory worker and was ordered by gendarmes to operate a machine for tea production. When he failed to obey the order he was given a snake beating by gendarmes. He died the following day. Pascal Baforgha and Julius Ngala Ngah, two other protesters, were shot in the abdomen and knee respectively.

To compound matters, Baba Danpullo brought workers from

Ndawara, where he had started another tea plantation, to replace the striking Dnu tea workers. This was after the demonstrating workers had used eucalyptus trees to block the roads and had taken hostage Mohammed Falalou, Ndu tea manager and the workers' club president, Japhet Koni. They had also rejected a sum of more than FCFA 181 million which Danpullo had provided for the payment of their dues. The money was rejected outright several times after Northwest Governor Koumpa Isa personally came and pleaded that they should take it, while efforts were made to provide more money. The more than 2000 workers insisted on a sum of over FCFA 3 billion which Godlive Mboki, Donga-Mantung SDO, considered outrageous. This, he argued, was twice the amount the tea estates were used to. But the workers remained obdurate. They later paraded through the streets carrying a cross and the coffins of 8 'Judas Iscariots', those of their colleagues who went surreptitiously and collected their own dues. They later visited the homes of these eight 'Isariots' and wrote on their doors 'May your souls rest in perfect peace'.

All attempts to placate the striking workers failed after several meetings with Robert Nkili, the labour and social security minister, some of them in the presence of Danpullo. Danpullo reportedly argued that no money had been made available to him before the privatization deal for the payment of workers' arrears.

'Good Samaritan' Rebuffed

It could easily be imagined that because of the fabulous amounts demanded by the workers, the CTE had become an albatross on the back of its proprietor and that Baba Danpullo would jump for joy if some Good Samaritan offered to buy it off him. One person who nursed such an idea was Charles Namme Menyoli, the founder and manager of Fakoship, a Buea-based transport and shipping company. 'Pa Menyoli' as the Fakoship boss is fondly called, expressed his intention to take over Tole Tea Estate in a letter dated 10 July 2006, addressed to Prime Minister Ephraim Inoni. The letter was presented at a press conference in Buea. In the letter, Fakoship stated that he intended to put an end to the 20 years of hardship at Tole.

'As a key player in the current restructuring of our company' reads the letter, 'you must be painfully aware that the privatization of the CDC tea estates can hardly be characterized as a success. Completed over four years ago, this privatization effort was intended to spin off the CDC tea Estates into a profitable company, improve the living conditions of the workers and boost the local economy, thereby meeting the government's goal of poverty alleviation. Unfortunately, none of these has come to pass.'

'During the past four years' the letter continued, 'we have instead

witnessed with profound dismay sustained labour unrest at Tole Tea Estate which has the potential to result in wider social strife; economic activities in the area have ground to a halt and hopes for a better future have been turned into misery. Currently the Tole Tea Estate lies dormant, as all operations have been suspended, the tea plantations grow wild; the employees lick their wounds and the local economy plunges deeper and deeper into depression. This, you would gladly agree, was not the intent of privatization and while the government has attempted to mediate in the labour unrest, and address the workers' concerns, it is not clear that a lasting solution has been found.'

Pa Menenyoli urged the government as mediator to convene a meeting with the present owner of the tea estates and initiate discussions on the buy-out by Fakoship of the erstwhile CDC Tea Estates acquired by the CDC that is designated the Tole Tea Estate. An immediate restructuring based on a memorandum of understanding resulting from the aforementioned and its evaluation by a duly accredited accounting firm provided for a private closed-door settlement between CTE and Fakoship based on an amortized or complete outright buyout of the aforementioned Tole Tea Estate. A timetable and time line was presented geared towards the immediate deployment and running of the Tole Tea Estates as a valuable business unit and the irrefutable maintenance in name and quality of the product brand in the international marketplace.' The letter accused the present owner of the Tea Estate of not respecting the tripartite deal of privatization by not involving the workers in threw management of the estates. It was with this in mind that, the statement said, 'Fakoship wants to negotiate with the government and CTE to bring in their management strategy to revamp the estate.'

In the question and answer session that followed, other Fakoship officials further justified their takeover bid by saying it was in the interest of all Cameroonians that Tole was in their backyard and that the estate risked closure if the standoff between the workers and CTE management continued. If Menyoli expected a pat on the back for his 'patriotism' he was sadly mistaken. Instead, his heart certainly skipped a beat when Danpullo's reply to his letter came in a fax message from Nigeria dated 18 July 2006. The message reminded Menyoli that the government had sold the tea sector four years earlier intimating that the tea company was closed not because of financial bankruptcy or serious managerial crisis on the part of CTE but because of issues that should have been resolved by the government before the privatization decision was signed. These issues included the livelihood of the workers which had been used by 'disruptive elements' that wanted to frustrate the workers and destabilize the tea industry.

'Finally, the mask has fallen and we can now see the faces of

those behind the scenes in the ongoing conflicts at 'Tole,' stated the fax. Danpullo thought that Menyoli's statement was that the crisis stemmed from poor management to ignorance, advising him to go to the 'right quarters' for better information. As Danpullo's anger rose, he stated by dint of being the elder that he (Danpullo) respected him but wanted the Fakoship boss to know that achievement deserved reverence and he (Danpullo) had achieved enough financially to deserve that reverence. He came close to describing Pa Menyoli as naïve, but apparently thought it better to simply wonder how the Fakoship director could imagine that the CTE proprietor could invest several billion in a project and abandon it. Danpullo was convinced somebody was fooling his 'elder brother'. If this were not the case, he argued, Pa Menyoli who knew him long before the crisis should have contacted him and discussed the matter rather than petitioning the prime minister concerning something that the government had sold. On a less aggressive note, the fax message explained that the CDC took the decision to close the Tole office because there was the need to replace the dilapidated factory built in 1928 with a new one. He reiterated that the Tole Tea Estate was not for sale and that restructuring was underway. The CTE, he reminded Menyoli, was bought in a regular privatization process, with open and transparent public tenders. If Fakoship wanted to buy the CDC tea component, Danpullo pointed out, it should have done so at the right time.

'If Mr Menyoli wishes to show that that he has financial resources, why does he not purchase the other agricultural sectors in CDC like palm oil, rubber or banana instead of exploiting the ignorance of the workers by creating confusion in their minds and making it difficult for them to focus on their work and provide for their families?' Danpullo reproached Pa Menyoli. Clever as Danpullo's message sounded, the fact still remained that the privatization process was carried out in a manner that raised doubts about the honesty of those who undertook it.

The questions many continued to ask include: why did Danpullo, a Cameroonian, with the right to buy or take over a part of his country's patrimony have to use a foreign company as a front? How could a public utility as big and lucrative as the tea component of the CDC be bought for just FCFA 1.5 billion? That Baba sold tea upfront for an estimated FCFA 2.8 billion less than one year after purchase is ample proof that he had taken over a gold mine. Those who negotiated the deal certainly knew the value of what they were giving away and must surely have been well rewarded for overlooking that fact. The questionable nature of the deal is contained in releases issued by an association of Ndu tea workers during the strike called 'Group for Protection of CTE Victims of Corruption and Influence Peddling'. The group, besides asking the above question, argued that the power struggle at the helm of the CDC soon

after its purchase caused the strike. They wondered why a board chairman should exist in the person of Baba Danpullo when there was no board of directors. The group was convinced that minsters in the Biya regime as well as traditional rulers and other highly placed individuals were involved in the shady deal.

One other unexplained development during the strike was the burning to death of Mahamat Alamine Mey, the person who took over from Niba Ngu as general manager of the CTE. He was found dead in his Toyota Carina Aventise car on Thursday 29 June on an isolated road that runs into the CDC, burnt beyond recognition. It was thanks to Dr Rene Mouliom that the charred remains – his backbone, spine, skull, sternum and thigh bones – could be traced back to the former CTE manager. Looking at his posture, an observant commentator remarked that it could be seen that he had made no attempt to move, suggesting that he was tied to the seat.

Alamine had been the assistant manager to Niba Ngu. He was appointed general manager on 4 January 2003 after the former was sacked. Despite his competence, things did not improve, especially because Baba took most of the decisions. On 15 January 2004 trouble set in. Baba sacked some 585 workers and moved the headquarters of the CTE from Bota to Douala. Alamine worked in Douala before resigning. To date no clue has been given to the public about the exact cause of his death.

Concluding Remarks on Danpullo

One of the most memorable remarks ever made by the late Albert Mukong is contained in his book *My Stewardship in the Cameroon Struggle*. Commenting on Jean Fochive, the late delegate general for national security whom many referred to as ‘the Cobra of Africa’ because of his incomparable ruthlessness, Mukong remarked that anyone who met him found it difficult to associate him with the deeds usually attributed to him.

The same observation could be made about Baba Danpullo but with this singular distinction: that the latter acts mainly in self-defence. Baba does not believe in failure and as such uses all the weapons at his disposal. In his determination to subdue MBOSCUDA, he is ready to confront even the devil physically. At a certain point in the struggle, his lawyer, though a relation of Fru Ndi’s, detained Nana Sarli, the SDF national chairman’s private secretary, for close to two weeks for his active role in the association. Nana is now in the UK and many believe that his departure is not unconnected to the Baba/MBOSCUDA conflict. He is, however, a man who easily identifies with a battle he cannot win. For instance, when close to forty heavily armed robbers confronted him at his Douala residence, he bowed to the advice of Hussein, one of his sons

who preferred the loss of all the money available to the loss of even a single hair on his or his father's head. 'What do you want?' the son asked them. When they replied that they wanted money and not the billionaire's life, the young man was pragmatic 'Let us give them all the money we have in the house'. The hooligans reportedly departed with FCFA 500 million and a gold watch which had cost Baba FCFA 5 million.

He is a man of very few words. He hates talking about himself and until the CTE crisis came up, never granted press interviews. The few words attributed to him in newspapers or on radio and television were made during crisis situations where he spoke out of sheer necessity. And on those occasions he was more eager that people should know what he is not rather than what he is. He does not say what he likes but what he is not pleased about and gives the impression that he is careful not to point direct accusing fingers. For instance, during a crisis management meeting organized by Robert Nkili on 4 September 2006 at the height of the CTE uprising, he played Pontius Pilate, blaming his political opponents for it. 'Since we took over the tea company in 2002, we have had a lot of problems. We are doing our best, but we cannot be allowed to work.' He said he had fulfilled his own part of the bargain by making available FCFA 280 million for the settlement of the dues of workers and that the government added FCFA 100 million. He also said the CTE had settled salary arrears for Ndu tea workers for four years. A piece of information the workers confirmed.

During an earlier crisis meeting at the Northwest governor's office on 14 February 2006, he had equally portrayed himself as a victim of circumstances. The meeting was necessitated by a rebellion in Santa and the destruction of millions of tea seedlings. The protesters had proceeded to mount road blocks obstructing traffic along the Bamenda-Bafoussam-Yaoundé highway. The protesters accused their traditional rulers of selling land that could serve agricultural purposes to the business magnate and even threatened 'roasting' the traditional rulers as had been the case with one of them the previous year. During the meeting, Baba made himself an object of sympathy and even admiration when he announced that tea seedlings worth FCFA 500 million had been destroyed by the protesters. He also gave the impression that the purpose of extending tea planting to Santa was to provide employment to the youth. He denied coveting land, saying it was a fact that we would all die and leave it behind. Ntumfor Nico Halle, the spokesperson for all Northwest traditional rulers, expressed profound admiration for him. I have conversed with Baba twice — once during a press briefing that followed the 14 February meeting and later at his Ndawara residence. The image he presents of himself is of one who wouldn't hurt a fly. A picture which contradicts MBOSCUA's opinion of him.

His attachment to the Kom palace from where his mother came has been manifested by the donation of strong four-wheel-drive cars he makes available for the Fon each time the need arises. This attachment to the Kom Fondom is the greatest weapon the Mbororos use to confirm that he is not one of theirs. But whatever may be said of Danpullo, nobody questions his ingenuity or the fact that he is a billionaire. He was the first Cameroonian to run a private airline (UNITAIR) in the early 1990s. He is aspiring to be the greatest dealer in tea in the world. Many believe he is already unbeatable in Africa. Whatever headaches he had during the CTE crisis have been put behind him. He has paid his outstanding debts to his workers and ex-workers and can today boast of sleeping soundly. His DAN television, a private TV company, is about to go operational under the able leadership of Nyoh Moses, a talented journalist who resigned from CRTV for that purpose. Danpullo's only source of headache now is a query sent by the UN to the Cameroon government about the Mbororo Crisis. Nyoh Moses told me Baba has already given a tangible and well-worded reply. The query was sent because of numerous complaints that he uses the Mbororo community like a colossus and that 'like flies to wanton boys is he to the Mbororos and Fulanis' and that he oppresses them for his sport. Even if the query bothers him, it doesn't appear so. His puppet Lamido Mamadou Sabga is still 'mischievously' seated on the throne of Sabga. Danpullo is on good terms with the new governor of the Northwest, Mahamat Abakar.



A Magician at the Presidency

One of the best lessons Shakespeare taught politicians was that if they wanted to achieve their ambitions, they must demonstrate great humility. 'Lowliness is young Ambition's ladder,' the playwright tells us in *Julius Caesar*. The destination of the climber is the top. Once there, he is free to spurn or mock those below. Perhaps no politician in Africa has followed this maxim of Shakespeare. During the 20 years that Paul Biya served his predecessor Amadou Ahidjo, he never once gave his master any hint that he was eyeing the country's top job. When therefore Ahidjo chose him as his successor, he thought he was handing power to a weakling who he would be able to manipulate at will. The former president is said to have acted according to the dictates of his French masters who said he would die if he failed to relinquish power. Ahidjo handed over power to Biya on 4 November 1982 understanding that he (Ahidjo) would retain the chairmanship of the ruling Cameroon National Union Party.

The rationale behind the idea of presenting gifts to God (giving alms in church which unchristian minds criticize) is to show gratitude to the Creator. If he who provided us the means for sustenance wants a little of it back, it is His manner of finding out whether we are grateful for what he gave us. It is for the same reason that a mother or father asks a child to give him a share of a piece of bread or cocoyams which the same parent gave. If the child refuses, the parent would be justified in concluding that s/he will grow up to be a selfish individual.

Besides the party leadership, Biya was to furnish and give Ahidjo a residence near Yaoundé's municipal lake. This was not asking too much considering the fact that Ahidjo gave Biya the country's most lucrative job. But Biya denied him this small favour by delaying it. After waiting in vain for several months Ahidjo was reduced to staying at Mont Febe Hotel which, though to the average citizen was at that time the symbol of luxury, is mean accommodation for a former head of state fresh from the trappings of power.

It was, however, over the party chairmanship that conflict ensued similar to that which took place between King Lear and his two

daughters, Goneril and Reagan, between whom he had shared his kingdom. Biya, who raised no objection to Ahidjo's continuation as party chairman before taking power, saw everything wrong with it once at the summit of the state. Before taking power it was firmly resolved that he couldn't be a rider of a horse whose reins or strings were pulled by another. The ruling party, he argued, fomented the policies that enabled the country to function. Therefore whoever ruled the country should direct the party.

When Ahidjo didn't appear to see reason, he came to the conclusion that the best way to end the conflict was to put his predecessor permanently on the defensive. He accused Ahidjo of subversion, of plotting his overthrow, the sentence for which was the death penalty. Ahidjo, who had since sensed danger and chosen sanctuary abroad, was tried in absentia, using the same laws he put in place and was sentenced to death. That was in 1983.

It could easily be assumed that the nation cried injustice and damned Biya for being an ingrate. Far from it. Many Cameroonians still looked in anger at Ahidjo's 24-year rule which was in reality as a prolonged state of emergency that no rational being could be nostalgic about.

In 1984 the Biya regime completed what it had begun by purging the presidential guard of suspected Ahidjo loyalists through a coup plot stage-managed by Biya's Beti henchmen in collaboration with Fochive, the delegate of national security whose unprecedented ruthlessness had earned him the nickname the 'Cobra of Africa'. In the same year, Biya flirted with democracy, first by changing the name of the ruling party from the CNU to the CPDM, and then choosing Bamenda as the birthplace of the 'new' political structure. He next announced that he needed challengers but the challenger had to obtain 300 signatures from all the country's ten provinces, i.e. 30 per province and those who had to sign were the top-ranking personalities who enjoyed their lucrative positions thanks to the head of state himself. He finally stood for election unchallenged and, true to tradition, won by 99.99%.

The return of multiparty democracy, as already recounted, almost threw Biya off balance but after seven years he recollected himself and became a political Maradona, even more formidable than his schoolmaster Ibrahim Babangida, who the nickname was first given to. He dribbled the Cameroonian opposition with so much expertise that Fru Ndi became in 17 years the political humpty dumpty of Cameroon. Nor was the international community any safer in his hands. Biya would not deny any proposals for reform but was so tactful in providing snakes for fish that foreign donors praised him for offering anything at all. The most glaring example was an outfit called ELECAM (Election Cameroon) that

was created to replace the NEO and supposedly to serve as an independent electoral commission. The Commonwealth and even the Cameroonian opposition, which had always treated all reforms of the regime with suspicion, agreed that ELECAM was something. What they forgot or pretended not to know was that Biya didn't even see himself ever going by the appellation 'ex-president'. For a man who had Cameroonized democracy instead of democratizing Cameroon, ELECAM simply meant conducting elections the Cameroonian way.

Until the Commonwealth became unflattering about free and fair elections, Biya was unperturbed. As a rule, he is receptive and mentally alert when in the presence of foreign diplomats, one reason why *Focus on Africa's* Vincent Tsas described him as 'clever but lazy'. He is so carefree a captain one wonders just how he manages to keep the nation afloat. Biya would rather receive a group of young men who praised his new suit than the prime minister to discuss how to fight corruption in the country. He appoints ministers based on the recommendations of his strategists without the least desire to know them personally. These unfamiliar collaborators can only be pointed out to him by his closest aides during cabinet meetings. Biya is anything but comfortable in unfamiliar company. The Hon. Paulinus Jua, former SDF MP who represented his party on the country's constitutional council headed by Biya expressed disgust that he sat so close to the president for over five hours during a council meeting without the head of state turning, even once, to look at, let alone speak to him. Biya does not pretend to be comfortable in Cameroon and once confessed that he was more at ease working in Geneva than in Cameroon. He is always so pleased to be away that he is never in a hurry to return when he goes abroad and spends sometimes more than a month on 'brief' visits abroad. Even if the visit is private, his departure must be the subject of such great propaganda that all vehicles stop moving and economic activities in Yaoundé are brought to a halt to remind city dwellers that the almighty head of state is about to travel. Even when he decides to behave as a mortal, for instance, when riding a bicycle which is his favourite exercise, he still wants to be seen in the light of a mortal who has condescended to be at the level of a human being. The most offensive remark you can make about Biya is to hint that he has any ailment. Pius Njawe, the publisher of *Le Messager*, one of the country's leading French language newspapers, almost paid the supreme price when he insinuated in a headline story that the president might have had a heart attack during a football match in Yaoundé. Njawe, a diabetes patient, spent 10 months without any satisfactory medical care in New Bell Prison among hardened criminal because he refused to retract the story.

One of Biya's most favoured pastimes is organizing cabinet reshuffles. He signs the decree making the appointments when, for

instance, seated on a plane travelling abroad. From his hotel suite in Geneva, he listens with God-like pleasure to information communicated by phone about how fallen heroes are lamenting, while those newly appointed are popping champagne corks. It is a moment of glory when he hears people collapse after the 'bombshell'. When Biya appoints a minister, he doesn't instruct him or her about what to do. If the minister succeeds, Biya takes the credit. If he fails, he carries the cross.

He dreads political leaders that oppose him but finds nothing wrong in plagiarizing their ideas. What Samuel Johnson says about Ben Johnson is equally true of Biya. Ben Johnson, the literary critic says, invades authors like a monarch and includes material shamelessly hijacked from them in his works without acknowledging their source. 'What is theft in others is victory in him.'

In like manner, the Biya regime has invaded the ideological warehouse of the SDF and carted away ideas on the organization of election primaries and the concept of an investiture committee to select candidates at party level ahead of national elections. The idea of praying before starting election rallies, using slogans and wearing caps and mufflers are all borrowed from the SDF. But the greatest booty the SDF has looted from the SDF library is the title of chairman. Though the SDF borrowed it from Mao Tse Tung, at the level of Cameroon it is theirs. Biya was CPDM president. Today he is called 'Chairman', so are all Cameroonian political leaders except Ndeh Ntumazah of the UPC. Ntumazah, who defines the word 'intellectual as one who calls things by their true names', describes a chairman as one who sits in a chair (on one spot) waiting for people to come and take instructions from him.

When electoral victory is needed, Biya does not mind breaking all the rules he has made. In fact, the late Gilbert Andze Tsoungui, one of his best election riggers ever, defended this conduct by saying laws are made by man and can be changed by man. The massive disenfranchisement of voters has never been condemned by Biya, who also never punishes those openly accused of rigging elections in favour of the ruling party. On the eve of the 2002 parliamentary and municipal elections, Biya assured all Cameroonians that they would never complain about flawed elections. The election of 30 June was one of the worst the country ever had. The regime introduced a strategy never used before in any country that I know: spying on voters. The elections were first allowed to take place on 23 June 2002. After less than an hour of voting, the government announced that voting had been stopped because of irregularities, among them, the non-arrival of election material in distant parts of the country. Ferdinand Kongou Edima, the minister of territorial administration (known in most countries as the minister of the interior), was sacked. Fru Ndi was so convinced by the official argument that he

did what no sensible opposition leader should do: he praised the government's decision on national television. He didn't know this was a trick to establish the trend of voting and reverse it if it wasn't in favour of the ruling party. I was at Ndop, the headquarters of Ngoketunjia which is my division of origin, when I heard the announcement. I later contacted some polling officials who were to represent the ruling CPDM party but who confessed that they voted for the opposition. 'We are finished,' one of them told me. 'Our party's parliamentary candidate came along with some of our top CPDM officials. They opened the ballot box and counted the votes cast. There were none for the CPDM.'

In the Southwest Province where a similar pro-opposition trend was noticed, some SDO and DOs went berserk disenfranchising suspected opposition supporters by overhauling voter registers and displacing names. The names of most of the voters who had registered to vote at one polling station were sent to other polling stations far from their places of residence. Newspapers identified the SDO of Fako Division and Dini Ngoe, DO of Buea, as two of the masterminds of the electoral fraud. The results of the election that was held on 30 June, one week later, were predictable: the ruling CPDM won with an absolute majority of 109 out of the 180 seats in Parliament, while the SDF had only 22. As stated earlier, the results were announced by the minister of communication while vote counting was still going on. While the SDF expected Biya to condemn the fraud, he instead congratulated his party on its 'brilliant performance' at the polls. Because of the disenfranchisement that took place that year, many Cameroonians vowed never to vote again.

The Commonwealth observer team was scandalized by what happened in 2002 and in the 2004 presidential elections that they boycotted those in July 2007. Biya invited and paid some former US senators who came to witness the voting and give a verdict on its fairness. But once out of Cameroon, one of them who went to Ukraine for a similar exercise, after reportedly pocketing a handsome financial reward, damned the Cameroonian electoral exercise as a masquerade.

The only western countries that showed any interest in the 2007 polls were the US, the UK and the Netherlands. Niels Marquadt, the US ambassador to Cameroon, saw in the Cameroonian president a remorseful political sinner in need of conversion. He didn't know that as far as free, fair and transparent elections were concerned, Biya was not only lost but irredeemable. He had such an unshakeable determination to see all government bills sail through the National Assembly that the whole of the democratic world could jump into the Atlantic Ocean if they cared to.

The three western diplomatic missions did everything they could

to ensure that credible elections were held, including working with the press to sensitize the masses on the need to register and vote. When complaints reached them that suspected opposition supporters were being turned away or frustrated by the administration, the three missions sent Cameroonian staff working with them to go and try to register. Out of the approximately 400 persons who went, less than fifty succeeded in registering in Yaoundé. They didn't give up. On Election Day, they did not only send observers to the field, the US embassy even provided journalists with credit to call and report what they saw in the field. I was in Santa and what I saw has already been narrated.

After the proclamation of the results by the Supreme Court and Biya's nationwide (state of the nation) address commending the 22 July polls, they issued a report on 16 August 2007 stating what they had observed. They acknowledged the peaceful nature of the poll and recommended improvements in future polls. The report, however, described what had happened on 22 July as 'a missed opportunity for Cameroon a missed opportunity to continue building public confidence in the democratic process as Cameroon looks ahead to its next elections'.

Below is the full report by the three western missions.

A Joint Dutch, US and British Statement

The Embassies of the United States and the Netherlands and the High Commission of the United Kingdom sent teams to all ten provinces of Cameroon to observe the legislative and municipal elections of 22 July 2007. This joint observer group congratulates the government and people of Cameroon on the fact that the voting took place in a generally calm atmosphere, without major public disorder. In particular, the joint observer group commends the government for the instances of progress since the previous elections such as the computerization of the voter rolls and the improved selection of neutral locations for polling stations. The joint observer group was pleased to see the electoral law fairly and properly applied in many cases, with officers clearly dedicated to a transparent voting process. The Supreme Court's decision to re-run the elections in five constituencies is a welcome recognition of some of these problems and should serve to strengthen the public's faith in the integrity of electoral process.

On the whole, however, these elections represent a missed

opportunity for Cameroon – a missed opportunity to continue building public confidence in the democratic process as Cameroon looks ahead to its next election. Some recommended improvements that were not just achievable but that the government had committed itself to achieving were in fact not achieved. For example, despite repeated public assurances, the government was unable to provide indelible ink – and internationally recognized safeguard against multiple voting – to many polling stations; this left the voting more open to fraud and reduced the credibility of the electoral process in the public's mind. The conduct of the elections, especially at the local level, was subject to irregularities. Observers witnessed examples of poor supervision at the polling stations, and in some cases, collusion of officials in what appeared to be a lax application of the electoral law and acts of fraud. Moreover, an unnecessarily complex registration process effectively disenfranchised some voters.

The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States commend the Government of Cameroon for its stated commitment to democratic progress in Cameroon. We look forward to working with the government, members of civil society and all others concerned to support their efforts to improve the credibility of Cameroon's democracy as the next election approaches. The early and effective realization of an independent election management body will be an important step in that direction because only a truly independent election body will give the citizens full confidence in the democratic process. We therefore urge the government to begin immediately taking the next steps necessary to continue building public confidence in the electoral process.

The report acted like a hypodermic syringe. Jean Marie Atangana Mebarah, the minister in charge of external relations, fired back, not only defending the regime's position but also trying to give the impression that it was unfair. Below is the regime's reply.

Government Statement

The embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the

United States and the High Commissioner of Great Britain and Northern Ireland made public a joint press release on August 16 2007 on the legislative and municipal elections of July 22 2007.

The Cameroon government is pleased with the interest these chancelleries have in so doing demonstrated in the organization of elections in Cameroon. The government thanks them for the effort they have made in this regard and for their congratulations for the state authorities: 'On the organization of the polls in a generally calm atmosphere' and 'for improvement noticed in comparison with past elections' as well as the 'right application of the electoral law in many localities' and 'for the transparent electoral process'.

The government expresses gratitude for their commitment to stand by it in the task of consolidation of Cameroonian democracy conducted for many years now under the high and constant impetus of His Excellency Paul Biya, President of the Republic and Head of State.

However, the Cameroonian government expresses its surprise at the time after the decision of the Supreme Court and the message of the Head of State to the nation, chosen by these diplomatic missions to make known their observations on the July 22 2007 polls.

The government recalls that throughout the preparatory phase of these elections, consultations were regularly held between the public administrations involved and diplomatic missions accredited to Yaoundé within the framework of the Electoral Process Support Group (EPSG) and structured political dialogue.

The government considers excessive the view that 'these elections are a missed opportunity to continue to build public trust in the electoral process'. This judgment appears to be founded on a few limited facts of relative importance.

The government points out on the contrary that the Supreme Court, sitting as the Constitutional Council, sanctioned a few noticeable shortcomings.

International observers assessed the July 22 2007 twin polls as globally satisfactory, credible and fair. Some of these observers pointed out, 'a material organization of voting operations far better than the elections of 2002 and 2004', refer to July 13 communiqué of the National Episcopal Council of Cameroon.

For the government, these twin elections stood as an

important step in the consolidation of our democratic process. In his message to the nation, the President of the Republic His Excellency Paul Biya confirmed the irreversible nature of this process. It is in this perspective that Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) was created on the 29 December 2006. Its effective putting into place is prescribed by a time frame set by the National Assembly made up of representatives of the sovereign people of Cameroon.

For the government these twin elections of July 22 2007 gave the Cameroonian people a chance to show once more their total trust in the institutions they freely chose for themselves and in the democratic and electoral process of which they are sovereign actors.

It may be recalled that at the end of these elections, our young democracy comes out strengthened. Five political parties are already represented in the National Assembly while awaiting the upcoming partial elections and a dozen more seats in different councils in the country. The government reiterates its willingness to pursue with its partners and friendly countries, the improvement of its electoral process according to existing norms and conventions with greater serenity and in mutual respect.

CRTV journalists went ahead and analyzed the statement by the foreign diplomatic missions, creating the impression that these missions were interfering in Cameroon's internal affairs. After a series of comments and analysis that lasted well over two days, the cacophony stopped as abruptly as it had begun. I later wrote my news analysis column in *The Post*, in which I asked a question which the editor deemed essential to highlight: 'If western diplomats had stated that that the elections were credible, would the regime have accused them of interfering in Cameroon's internal affairs?' As if he had been embarrassed by the external relations minister's response, Biya carried out a partial cabinet reshuffle a few days later, sacking Mebarah.

But surprisingly, the president castigated the western nations in innuendo, while holding his first cabinet meeting after the reshuffle. He rebuked those nations for their report challenging them to show him any nation on earth where elections have been really free. The press interpreted this remark as a jibe at the US which had a hitch in Florida during the presidential election that brought George Bush Jr. to power. With such arrogance, many may be tempted to think these western nations would get angry and sanction Biya. No way. The Magician at Etoudi has his way of placating his benefactors.

One reason why Biya is still respected, despite his political misdemeanours, is that he understands his countrymen very well. When he was about to order a slash of government workers' monthly pay by 70% in January 1993, France predicted an apocalyptic situation, a conflagration, an insurrection that would render the country ungovernable. But Biya assured them that nothing grievous would happen. Things came to pass as he had said. A devaluation of the FCFA took place soon after and peace still reigned. An open condemnation of such electoral fraud would have sent millions of people onto the streets in another politically volatile country. But in Cameroon, all the other provinces wait to see if Bamenda will react and even if it does, its inhabitants are likened to a vehicle without breaks. At the time of writing, there is a public debate as to whether Biya should be allowed to effect a change in the country's constitution and rule for another term after his mandate ends in 2011. The apt answer to that question has been given by Joseph Chongsi Ayeah, the director of the Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA) which is a non-governmental organization with its headquarters in Bamenda. 'Who will stop him? Biya does what he wants.' Chongsi's observation was hinged on the fact that Biya has always got the election results he needed because the SDOs and DOs who determine the results are all accountable to him.

It is remarkable that elections to the senate and regional councils, two other assemblies to come into existence according to Biya's 1996 Constitution, would not be by universal suffrage. Biya would appoint 30 of the 100 future senators, while the rest would be elected by councillors and MPs. The same councillors and MPs would elect members of the regional councils. The CPDM has 90% of all council and parliamentary seats in the country, meaning that it would have a walkover in the event that elections to the two assemblies mentioned took place. The summary of all this is that three elections were rigged on 22 July 2007. Or if we consider that both municipal and legislative elections took place on that date, then it can be said that the Biya regime rigged four elections in two.

Concerning the mandate extension debate, one school of thought sees otherwise, arguing that Biya really has no intention of embarking on another term. He is using the issue to divert public attention from the fight against corruption that threatens to engulf both him and his wife, Chantal, as happened during the trial of one of the embezzlement suspects, Gerard Emmanuel Ondo Ndong. During the trial, the suspect, a former director of the Council Support Fund, known by its French acronym (FEICOM), had implicated the Chantal Biya Foundation saying that about FCFA 150 million of the money he was accused of embezzling had been given as assistance to the foundation. Biya is suspected of dreading any further digging in the field of suspected embezzlement as

this would lead to him or his wife being exposed. The Cameroonian public has also not forgotten the Mess Messi affair of 1992, in which a former manager of the SCB Bank, a well-run financial institution at the time, revealed that the bank collapsed because the former first lady, the late Jeanne Irene Biya and her sisters borrowed staggering sums from it and to this day have not refunded them. History, these analysts argue, is about to repeat itself and Biya is anything but comfortable about it, hence his idea of a third mandate.

But what Biya will be remembered for is the very sophisticated rigging machinery he has created. In 1992 the method was still in its infancy but the regime can now boast that it has reached full adulthood. Biya is so confident of his methods that he is never bothered by proposals about how to improve the electoral process. He has no quarrel with computerization. After all, the information is put into the system by human beings and those human beings can still remove or change them. All that is important is that the human being in control should be subservient and loyal to him.

Transparent ballot boxes don't frighten him either. After all, he doesn't need to stuff them. If he needs a certain number of ballot papers, except for in the Northwest, his SDOs and DOs can do the rest of the work. After all, there is his Supreme Court, the hands of whose president are permanently tied so that he can't do anything other than proclaim the results doctored and given him by a counting commission which already knew the figures before voting even began. The minister of territorial administration makes the counting process easy by announcing the *tendence* or result tendencies before counting begins at the polling stations. Those who might have poured onto the streets to protest can't be allowed to do so by soldiers, policemen and gendarmes because what the radio is announcing is only a tendency. By the time the final results are out, the public has already been prepared for the result. There are no upheavals in Cameroon after voting because the rigging was transparent, beginning with the registration of voters through the voting process to the proclamation of the results.

Deliberate impoverishment of the electorate has made victory for Cameroon's ruling party easier. Youths are deprived of jobs so when at the summit of dependency and despair at election time, brand-new bank notes are taken out of the Treasury. A rally is organized during campaigning and some of these notes are distributed to them and are received the way hungry fowls go for corn. The buying of consciences is common because, as the late François Mitterrand once said, 'Africans need bread, not democracy'. A Cameroonian analyst aptly observed that if Mwai Kibaki had 'imported the sophisticated rigging machinery of Cameroon, three hundred Kenyans would not have lost their lives during

the last presidential election in that country’.

To sum up, Biya can be said to be a master of surprises. When between 2005 and 2007 the whole country was up in arms against homosexuals, Biya took everyone aback by his response. Instead of condemning the practice as stipulated in the Cameroon Penal Code, he sympathized with gays by castigating those that published a list of homosexuals. According to the president, *L’Anecdote* and *Le Meteo* newspapers, which published the list, were invading individual privacies. This statement emboldened Gregoire Owona and Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, whose names appeared on the list to initiate legal proceedings against the journalists who published the story. The homosexuality controversy was ignited by a sermon preached by the Archbishop of Yaoundé Mgr Tonye Bakot in which he described the practice as diabolic. It is alleged that some Christian women complained to him that they suspected intimate relationships between their husbands and their male secretaries and drivers. In an interview later granted to the *Eden* newspaper in 2007, the Archbishop said those initiating the practice were rich powerful individuals and that the victims were mostly jobseekers and the powerful were using their positions to exploit the weak. Biya’s open defence of the presumed homosexuals naturally resulted in speculation that he either saw nothing wrong in the practice of homosexuality or could be one himself. His name did not however feature in the list of homosexuals. The only person who has ever had the audacity to state that he is one is Daniel Ebale Angouno, mentioned at the beginning of the book. Ebale’s account in a publication titled *Blood – Biya’s Power Lotion* was posted on the Internet. He has actually dedicated a chapter in it titled ‘The Homosexuals’. The president wisely ignored the publication and that is why it soon ceased to be a topic of public debate.

It should, however, be said in fairness to Biya that Cameroon is more advanced than most African countries in the area of press freedom but the country’s corruption and human rights records remain some of the worst in the world.



The Role of the Church in Cameroon Politics

Barrister Bernard Muna, whose conflict with Fru Ndi has been narrated in some parts of this book may not be the great politician his father was but his observations on certain burning issues in Cameroonian politics portray him as a man of considerable insight. One such memorable utterance is his definition of politics as ‘the art of governing God’s people’. Ben Muna who spoke during campaigns ahead of the 22 July polls was deliberately contradicting the notion of politics as a ‘dirty game’ to be shunned by everyone who believes in God. Muna later elaborated on this theme to me, citing in particular a part of the Old Testament in which the people of Israel incurred the displeasure of the Almighty by telling Samuel that they needed a king whereas God saw himself as their king, having brought them out of the land of Egypt ‘and out of the house of bondage’. Their demand was seen as a rebellion or rejection of their rightful ruler.

Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee but they have rejected me that should reign over them. According to all the works they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me and served other gods. (1 Samuel 8:7-8)

During my own reading of the Holy Bible, I came across more evidence of God’s nature as a politician or at least one preoccupied with freedom, democracy and good leadership. The delivery of the Israelites from the hands of King Pharaoh, which is the subject of the Book of Exodus from Chapters 3-16, is characterized by negotiations with and sanctions on Pharaoh for intransigence, with Moses and Aaron for acting as God’s ambassadors. It is worth noting that among the ten plagues in Egypt, Pharaoh found the plague of frogs particularly disturbing. ‘Entreat the Lord that he may take the frogs away from me and from my people and I will let your people go.’ Moses and Aaron did as the King had pleaded and the frogs all died and were gathered up in heaps. Cameroon

Anglophones are more likely to understand the irksome nature of ‘frogs’ than other nationals. The uncouth nature of frogs was once illustrated by Mualimu Johnnie MacViban, a Cameroonian journalist who wrote in the national daily *Cameroon Tribune*: ‘If you are walking down the street and someone grips your arm before asking you what time it is by your watch, just know you have a perfect example of a “frog” standing in front of you.’ The political slogan that power is never given on a platter of gold but fought for is well demonstrated by the metaphorical journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land, a journey that normally should take a few days or weeks, but that lasted for over four decades. Readers of the scriptures would acknowledge that the journey was characterized by a lot of obstacles, including physical fighting and enormous bloodshed.

Daniel’s direct involvement as a critic of the monarchy in Babylon is highly favoured by God who delivers him from hungry lions, just as he rescues Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, his companions and critics of Nebuchadnezzar’s regime from a raging furnace (Daniel 3:13-30; 6: 4-24). The need for tolerance and dialogue in politics is clearly illustrated in the Book of Job where God twice grants an audience to Satan in heaven and seeks his opinion about the man Job.

‘And there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan “Whence cometh thou?” And Satan answered “From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down it”’ (Job: 1, 6-12.2:1-6). In Cameroon dialogue has been under contemplation for seventeen years but never effected. It is believed that Biya is the African head of state who has shunned dialogue with his opponents for the longest period, although he places the blame of intransigence on the opposition, specifically SDF Chairman John Fru Ndi.

Lord Byron who commends this dialogue between the forces of Good and Evil in his poem *The Vision of Judgment* describes the differences between God and Satan as political, an argument Milton’s Satan equally advances in *Paradise Lost*. Jesus Christ provides a practical example of the sort of relationship which should exist between a leader and his people, a relationship of tolerance and exchange of ideas as he washes the feet of his apostles to demonstrate humility. But in Cameroon, political leaders are seen as demi-gods to be worshipped. The word ‘minister’ actually signifies the public servant but in Cameroon he is a lord to be dreaded like the Roman tyrant who said he didn’t mind being hated as long as his subjects feared and obeyed him.

It was Christ who introduced what today is known as the opinion poll, whereby a leader seeks to be acquainted with the opinion the public has of him or her. This is when he asks his apostles ‘Whom do men say I

am?'. Surprisingly only Simon Peter, among the twelve men with whom he had been moving, eating and sharing ideas, knows that he is the Christ, the son of the living God. Christ immediately appoints him the head of his church, with the prerogative to decide who enters heaven or not. Here Christ demonstrates another lesson that those appointed must first prove their faith and loyalty to leadership. Peter is also the oldest of the apostles and given that wisdom should go with age, is the wisest (Matthew 16:13-19).

In Cameroon, political leaders assume they are still at the summit of fame, even after the press, society's watchdog, pointed out otherwise. Quite often the politician finds fault with the messenger rather than the message. The lesson of appointing experienced people has been exaggerated in Cameroon where Biya appoints old classmates, many of them octogenarians who cannot think for five minutes without breaking down. He is more comfortable with these political underachievers because he knows they are too old to contemplate, let alone execute, any plot against him. The octogenarians are only too elated to be where younger people should be to think of doing or saying anything vicious against their benefactor. Biya also does this to tell them 'you might have been more brilliant in school than I, but I am lording over you today'. He may genuinely still respect some of them and reasons, as the often-quoted Chinua Achebe says, that those whose palm kernels have been cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble.

The issue of political appointments based on merit and not loyalty alone has also been demonstrated by the biblical story of the beggar, Lazarus, the rich man Dives and Abraham. Lazarus has faith in God but does nothing to improve himself while on earth. The rich man Dives requests to be carried out and dumped at the gate because he smells and dogs are leaking his wounds. Lazarus dies and goes to heaven. The rich man dies and goes to hell. While there he almost 'dies' of thirst because of the unbearable heat from the lake of fire into which he had been plunged by the weight of his iniquity and looking up to heaven sees Lazarus seated at the bosom of Abraham. He pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to get just a drop of water for him to quench his thirst because the heat is unbearable. After Abraham had rebuked him for being unsympathetic to Lazarus while on earth, the former rich man still entreats Abraham to send Lazarus to earth to warn his (the rich man's) family that they should shun evil so as not to meet him in the everlasting bonfire.

This story is not just an indictment of selfish people but a lesson that people should not just sit and do nothing on earth and hope to be in an elevated place in heaven. Methuselah lived for 969 years but wrote no book, made no scientific discoveries and invented nothing. To place him

on the same pedestal in heaven as the saints and martyrs who slaved and died for religion would be an endorsement of an uneventful life on earth. Then it would no longer be necessary to ask the vital question on Judgment Day 'What did you do on earth?'.

The last important lesson I think Christ taught politicians is that greed would not allow many of them to practice sharing. The feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fishes preaches a commendable lesson. Christ demonstrated sympathy for them and that was why he did not want them to go hungry. He did not conjure up the bread and fishes, they were bought demonstrating first the willingness to part with money, before using his powers as God to perform the miracle of multiplying the quantity. But in Cameroon, politicians think their militants will be content with resounding eloquence and don't bother to provide entertainment for them after lengthy rallies even after the regime has doled out exorbitant sums to political parties. The SDF is reported to have been given FCFA 217 million for campaigns ahead of the 22 July 2007 polls but considered much of the money more useful in its bank account than in the market buying food and drinks for the refreshment of those whose votes they were begging for. The usual argument is that the money is not enough and that most of it is used to register militants aspiring for elective positions but who are too poor to do so from their pockets. Ben Muna registered all his aspiring councillors and parliamentary candidates from his own pocket, proving that the amount used was not as prohibitive as Fru Ndi and Co. made the world believe.

The position of the major churches on Cameroonian politics equally emphasizes the point: the church cannot fold its arms and watch Christians trampled upon by ruthless politicians. This position is well elaborated on in the declarations of the Episcopal Council, which is made up of Cameroon's bishops. After the SDF's launch in 1990 the bishops asked three important questions in their pastoral letter 'Why are our banks empty? Who emptied them? Where are the people who emptied them?'.

The Catholic newspaper *L'Effort Camerounaise* emphasizes the point in its edition No. 414 in a headline 'The Church in Politics: When Criticisms Become an Evangelical Obligation'. The essay begins as follows

At a time many are raising eyebrows, becoming increasingly hostile and profoundly critical of the Churches' involvement in politics, the Archbishop of Douala, Christian Cardinal Tumi, has said any church that allows things to go to ruin in the society in which it is found, will be culpable before God for negligence of

mission. He said the church house is too small for church leaders and they need to go out into the world and defend fundamental human values. Although some may describe it as neo-evangelical imperialism, the Church's involvement in politics is essentially regulatory.

The same edition of the paper carried an interview granted by Rev. Nyansako ni-Nku, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon's PCC, in which he argues that people cannot stay out of politics or watch things go wrong. He mentions the case of the Prophet Ezekiel to whom God said he had appointed him the watchman of society (Ezekiel 3:17). As proof of the influence of politics on human life, Ben Muna always told listeners in Pidgin English during his campaign rallies before the 22 July polls 'If you no do politics, politics go do you'.

Dante ridicules those who are indifferent to politics or pretend to be so that the hottest part of hell is reserved for those who, in the heat of a political controversy, pretend to be neutral. Unfortunately the biblical concept that rulers are where they are because God wants them to be there has unfortunately been abused by rulers, beginning with the ancient kings who claimed to rule by divine right to the present day's 'enlightened despots like Biya, who feel so confident that like the legendary wrestler who challenged his guardian spirit to single combat', their communication minister says, 'not even God can change the results of a rigged election'.

Politicians who think they can always defy divine power and seek protection from the adversary forget or pretend not to know, as Bernard Shaw rightly observes in his preface to *Saint Joan* that 'the law of change is the law of God'. And Alfred Lord Tennyson advises rulers who have been in power to leave before power leaves them. Such a change, he argues, is necessary lest one good custom should corrupt the world. It is in line with this philosophy that the Sudanese billionaire Mo Ibrahim has instituted a prize for heads of state that leave power voluntarily. The winner of the 2007 award, the pioneer edition, was Joaquim Chissano. Edward Ngalah, a Bamenda-based consultant on good governance who attended the occasion said it was presided over by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who highlighted the pleasures of retirement from active politics.



Postscript

Thomas Jefferson. No historian or journalist ignores this name. He is well known not only for drafting the Declaration of Independence for the original thirteen states that made up the US in 1776 but also for a significant remark he made about the press and the government. According to Jefferson, if he had to choose between a government and the press, he would not hesitate to choose the former. Even Frederick 11, King of Prussia and despot, admitted that without the writer he was bound to fail as a ruler when he told Voltaire, ‘Philosophers like you say what ought to be and kings like us are there to implement what you say’. Joseph 11 of Austria, a fellow ‘enlightened despot’ went further than Frederick by permitting a free press, although this, according to historians, was one reason for his failure as a ruler because with this act he opened the flood gates of criticism against his government. Napoleon Bonaparte was later to admit that he was more afraid of the press than of 1000 bayonets.

There is no novelty in this veneration for writers. Ancient poets like Homer and Virgil claimed that what they wrote was dictated to them by the Muses. In other words, they were merely scribes, secretaries taking down what the gods told them to write. That might have been their own way of protecting themselves from dictatorial rulers who equally claimed to be servants of God. The veneration of great thinkers was so great that conquerors, like Alexander the Great of Asia Minor, spared the houses of philosophers when he invaded Greece. The same conqueror is said to have carried a copy of Homer’s epic poem *The Iliad* on his military campaigns.

The first military coup in Nigeria in 1966 took place soon after the publication of Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*. The author, then working for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, narrowly escaped arrest because it was suspected that he knew about the plot. However, the military might have acted on the strength of his book which depicted high-level corruption in the country exemplified by Chief Nanga’s fraudulent election victory. Wole Soyinka has been a thorn in the flesh of successive military regimes in Nigeria and played a significant part in the

suspension of his country from the Commonwealth after the hanging of Ken Sarowiwa and the rest of the Ogoni Nine by the regime of the late Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha.

The role of the Cameroonian writer is not different. During my 17 years as a reporter and analyst in Cameroon, I have suffered all kinds of indignities at the hands of politicians. For instance, when politicians especially of the same party are in solidarity, we are simply referred to as the 'press boys'. But when things turn sour or when a junior politician's views are suppressed by a senior journalist this becomes important. 'Where is the press? Where is Peterkins? I want to talk now. I want an interview', the oppressed politician will call. In the early 1990s, when sensational journalism was common and nearly every utterance by Fru Ndi was considered gospel truth, it was common to hear 'You people are doing a great job'. But write one critical sentence against Fru Ndi and you are accused of being a sell-out, one who has 'eaten soya'. Fru Ndi, who claims to have brought democracy and press freedom to Cameroon, once threatened to stab me if I ever wrote anything critical about him. I remember that date well. It was 21 January 1996, the date of municipal elections in Cameroon. It was around 7 pm and the votes had just been counted and the SDF had won not only the Bamenda urban council but five other major urban councils in the country. I was in Ntarinkon when Fru Ndi thanked militants for their adhesion to the party and cautioned them to behave like mature pope since they had finally obtained the election victory they needed. As proof of maturity, he advised them to stop erecting road blocks and burning worn-out motor tires, reported the story in *The Herald*. The title of the report was 'Overwhelmed by Electoral Victory, Fru Ndi Sues for Peace, Says Time for Violent Protests Are Over'.

Communication Minister Kontchou, whose party was still smarting from its electoral setback in major towns, saw the publication as a golden opportunity to nail Fru Ndi. He brandished the paper on television as proof that Fru Ndi had been promoting violence. When I went to town the next day, I learnt SDF party police (vanguards) were hunting me. I knew they were looking for me because of the publication. I decided to go to Fru Ndi's residence with a copy of the paper so that the SDF chairman could say what he thought was wrong with the publication and my newspaper would correct it in the next edition. I met one of his sour-faced female vanguards who spoke to me with very little reverence, accusing me of being one of those who had connived with the ruling CPDM to destroy their party. Other fanatics joined her, shouting and threatening to beat me up. The noise reached Fru Ndi who was in his living room. He rushed out immediately, seized the copy of *The Herald* I was holding, tore it to shreds and was proceeding to box me when two of

his close aides restrained him: ‘You son of a bitch,’ he screamed at me. ‘If I hadn’t brought democracy and press freedom to Cameroon, how would you survive? Today, you can write freely, publish and make money .If you ever write such trash about me again, I will stab you.’

Here was a man who claimed to have brought press freedom to Cameroon, saying at the same time that he would murder somebody for criticizing him. Since that day Fru Ndi and his collaborators have hated me like the plague. On 22 July 2007, I accompanied other journalists to Ntarinkon to get his views about the election. I knew my presence was a source of vexation to him and before going told Lucas Teneng, the publisher of *The Reporter* newspaper, about my presentiment. But he said and insisted that Fru Ndi was a Christian and a forgiving father. I decided to prove him wrong, although I didn’t say so.

While at Ntarinkon, I wanted to greet Fru Ndi, but he avoided me. When we were about to go he gave FCFA 5000 to each of the seven journalists with whom I went there to enable them buy petrol for the car they were using to move round and report on the election and refused to give me anything. My friends expressed sympathy but I told them I didn’t go to the SDF chairman’s compound for money and that my newspaper, *The Post*, paid me a monthly stipend.

I later published an objective report on the election, giving a faithful account of what Fru Ndi had said. In the various analyses I have made in *The Post*, I have also been impartial. If he is honest, Fru Ndi can’t deny that he implemented the advice I gave in my news analysis in *The Post* No. 0882 of Monday 13 August 2007. The piece was titled ‘How to Win an Election in Cameroon (Revision Notes for Parliamentary Rerun Candidates)’. All those who have followed the political evolution of Cameroon would admit that there is no exaggeration in what I have recounted in this book about the SDF. The analyses are based on facts and if anything inaccurate has been included, it is an error and should be seen as such.

Fru Ndi is also not the only politician to have had differences with me or with my colleagues in the profession. And however much they may detest my writing style, by acting the way they do, politicians only confirm that the press is a force to be reckoned with. I can’t say like Alexander Pope that men who are not afraid of God are afraid of me. But I believe that a true writer or journalist is not one being hailed everywhere as a hero but one who is always in danger of being stoned like the biblical Stephen because of his incisive style or some startling revelation he has made about the misdemeanours of ordinary individuals or those in authority. Whenever a thing is published that displeases a politician, the writer is accused of exaggeration. ‘Why is it that you people put big headlines but in the story we find little or nothing?’ one politician asked

me after reading a story he considered unsavoury.

I asked him why he didn't also go and ask the woman selling potatoes in Santa or at the Bamenda food market why she arranged the food stuffs in her bucket or basket in such a way that the small ones were at the bottom and the big ones on top. Why should only the journalist be at fault for employing the inverted pyramid style in presenting his stories?

As hinted earlier, Fru Ndi is sincere when he doesn't like a particular individual but as a leader it would be better if he became more tolerant because criticism is the price he must pay for the exalted position he enjoys in society. In fairness to him, he has done more for Cameroon democracy than fellow opposition leaders. It is only in the domain of press freedom that he has often acted as a catalyst in a chemical reaction that hastens the process, but it remains unchanged at the end.

It is also important to tell the politician that the truth is not necessarily what he thinks it is. There is objective and there is relative truth. When, for instance, somebody says 'pork is good', the veracity of the statement depends on whether he is talking to a Muslim whose religion forbids its consumption or to a person from Dschang in the Western Province where pork is a delicacy hailed for its high fat and protein content.

I have on several occasions received my own share of the 'national cake of harassment, arrest and intimidation' for telling what I am convinced is the truth. I will continue to tell it. I have been a victim of backstabbing by friends because they think most politicians and the elite in Anglophone Cameroon consider me credible. I can't say with certainty if this is true. But what I can say with absolute confidence is that in a bid to denigrate me, some of my colleagues have become informants of Fru Ndi, his lawyers and friends, all describing me as 'a dangerous element'. One of them even reported me to the gendarmerie but failed to convince them of my culpability. He, however, successfully persuaded them to fleece FCFA 30,000 from me, which they shared among themselves. I have since forgiven him because, as Francis Nkwain, a former minister and CPDM diehard supporter once said, 'Blackmail is always of the strong', although he erroneously uses the word blackmail as a synonym for backstabbing. The backstabbers are either not aware or have forgotten Iago's declaration in Shakespeare's *Othello*. 'He who filches away from me and my good name robs me of that which does not enrich him, but leaves me poor indeed.' I have done my best to arouse Cameroonians so that they can stand up against injustice. But my best may not have been good enough, as most of these 'superficial intellectuals' are more in love with beer, women and football than with ideas. Reading to most of them is only for the purpose of success in exams. Simon Nkweni, a civil-society leader, observed and aptly too that the best place to hide

information from a Cameroonian is to put it in a newspaper. If ideas could be condensed and put in bottles of beer, we would have been the wisest nation in the Commonwealth. For now, the mustard seed of ideas is growing only on a minority. Perhaps, as the economy continues to plummet and their purchasing power declines with each passing day, Cameroonians will one day stand up and say 'Enough is enough. After all, the French Revolution was more the outcome of practical needs than political theories.'

God the Politician is a compelling analytical, critical, informed and largely eyewitness account of the major events that have taken place in Cameroon since the return of multiparty politics in the 1990s. The accession of Paul Biya to power under the one-party regime in 1982 and the attempt to overthrow him in a coup d'état in 1984 are told in flashback, so are the excesses of power without responsibility that have come to be associated with over 25 years of Biya as President. Most of the story is centred on the struggle by the opposition, led by the Social Democratic Front (SDF), to overthrow the incumbent. In his determination to crush opposition, President Biya and his collaborators have sometimes used intrigue, but mostly force and callous indifference to basic human rights and to democracy. Bloodshed has often been the result of the regime's titanic struggles against freedoms.

President Paul Biya is not in a hurry to go and so instead of democratizing Cameroon, he has chosen to Cameroonize democracy, turning electoral fraud into an art. Because of massive fraud during elections and the inability of the opposition to unite, political party leaders have decided to join him who they cannot beat.

The book is an x-ray of a regime and the Frankenstein monsters it has created and sustained to thwart democracy. It exposes the corruption, electoral fraud, human rights abuse and cynicism that make politicians believe they can play God in the lives of Cameroonians.



Peterkins Manyong was born in 1959 in Baba 1, Ngoketunjia Division in the Northwest Province of Cameroon. He has a BA in English Modern Letters from the University of Yaoundé. He taught in several secondary schools, among them, Our Lady of Lourdes College and Longla Comprehensive College before embracing journalism. He is currently a leading political analyst, with regular features in *The Post* newspaper. He has won several prestigious awards in investigative journalism and political reporting.



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